

This chapter describes a transformative model for preparing graduate student instructors in any discipline to design and teach inclusive courses through a social justice framework.

Preparing Inclusive Educators Through Transformative Learning

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Research shows that attention to and awareness of social identities in higher education spaces can increase feelings of social belonging and, as a result, improve both student learning outcomes and metrics of faculty success (Strayhorn 2012; Harris et al. 2017). Despite these benefits, instructors identify barriers such as a lack of knowledge and skills to manage tensions that may arise from engaging with issues of identity in the classroom (Salazar, Norton, and Tuitt 2009). At the University of Michigan (U-M), there are several programs dedicated to addressing these needs with graduate student instructors (GSIs) across disciplines and at various levels of exposure. This chapter describes the *Diversity and Inclusive Teaching* seminar (DIT); an advanced, transformative model for preparing GSIs to use an inclusive mindset when developing and teaching courses.

The seminar, launched in 2003, is funded by the Rackham Graduate School and is a collaboration between the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT), which

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brings expertise on inclusive teaching and GSI development, and The Program on Intergroup Relations (IGR), which brings expertise in social justice education and integrative learning. This chapter describes the program in its most recent iteration, as developed and taught by the authors since 2017.

DIT is designed to promote advanced knowledge and skills in inclusive teaching as defined by CRLT:

“Inclusive teaching involves deliberately cultivating a learning environment where all students are treated equitably, have equal access to learning, and feel valued and supported in their learning. Such teaching attends to social identities and seeks to change the ways systemic inequities shape dynamics in teaching-learning spaces, affect individuals’ experiences of those spaces, and influence course and curriculum design.”

The following section describes how the curriculum and design of DIT promotes inclusive teaching as a mindset that supports student learning regardless of discipline, teaching context, or pedagogy. This approach pushes against assumptions that inclusive teaching means simply to “make students feel comfortable,” and instead focuses on offsetting the effects of systemic inequities (for example, racism, sexism, homophobia, economic inequality) that negatively influence student learning and experiences in higher education.

Transformative Learning

DIT exposes GSIs to a range of pedagogical theories and practical strategies to prepare them to teach inclusively. The ultimate goal of the content, design, and community-based structure of DIT is to cultivate an inclusive mindset in participants by moving beyond an *informative*

seminar experience to a *transformative* one. Key characteristics of this approach are outlined in Table 1.

The transformative approach utilized in DIT is rooted in the works of Paolo Friere, bell hooks, Leah Wing, Janet Rifkin, and others who seek to expose and disrupt the power hierarchies in teaching and learning. It is also informed by “transformative learning theory,” which requires deep self-reflection and complex problem-solving to become aware of and overcome assumptions and biases about the world (Mezirow 1996). Cultivating an inclusive mindset requires an investment in mutual vulnerability, reflection, and authenticity from facilitators and participants. The following sections provide key insights into critical considerations for setting up a program primed for this kind of transformative learning to occur.

Program Logistics: Facilitators, Participants and Teams

A critical element of making the seminar a success is thoughtful consideration of the passion, awareness, skills, and knowledge (Beale, Thompson, and Chesler 2001) brought into the space by the facilitators and participants. Intentionally identifying facilitators, selecting participants, and forming peer learning teams can improve learning and overall group satisfaction.

Identifying Facilitators. The seminar is co-facilitated by one individual from CRLT and one individual from IGR with expertise in inclusive teaching. Together, they should embody a broad representation of privileged and minoritized social identities, a willingness to engage in and model self-exploration, and a commitment to being a co-learner in the space.

Facilitators must be prepared to critically engage with their own social identities; experiences of power, privilege and oppression; and radical vulnerability prior to the seminar to be adequately prepared for the demands of the co-facilitator role. Having facilitators with diverse identities allows the seminar participants to learn from experiences and perspectives that may be similar or very different from their own.

Facilitators intentionally orient themselves as co-learners by sharing personal stories about how their identities and relative social power have shaped their experiences in higher education. Doing this type of intellectual and affective work alongside the participants disrupts norms around classroom instruction and creates a space where everyone is held accountable for learning to occur.

Selecting Participants. In its current form, DIT is offered once a year as a series of five weekly three-hour sessions. Interest in this type of intensive DEI training is in increasingly high demand by GSIs at U-M across disciplines who are in pursuit of enhancing their teaching skills and documenting their professional development in preparation for the job market. While it is publicized to all GSIs, it is geared towards those who have demonstrated a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI); have familiarity with concepts of social identity through coursework or other trainings; and have experience teaching. These criteria allow the seminar to be a deeper dive into inclusive teaching principles and practices by a cohort of highly committed individuals.

DIT asks interested GSIs to complete a short application to gain acceptance into the program. In 2019, sixty-three GSIs applied to the program: roughly 50% STEM, 25% social science, and 25% humanities. Reviewing applications provides insights on participants' past experience with DEI and their motivations for attending the seminar. Example questions

include: Why are you interested in taking this seminar? What have you observed or experienced as a student or instructor that has influenced how you understand the importance of DEI in the classroom? What do you anticipate will be the most challenging thing about this seminar for you and why?

As a result, facilitators are able to select a thoughtful and motivated set of GSIs who are best prepared to engage in a transformative learning experience, and are most likely to apply what they learn to their future practice. Facilitators are also able to recruit a diverse and balanced group in regards to discipline, gender, and race/ethnicity. With an average of fifteen to twenty GSIs per seminar, this manageable size allows the facilitators to create and model an environment of deep, continuous learning, trust, sharing, and vulnerability. Those with less experience in DEI are encouraged to participate in other campus offerings and invited to apply again in the future.

Creating Participant Teams. Once participants are selected, facilitators use application responses to place them into peer learning groups or “teams” that are used throughout the seminar. Interdisciplinary groups of four to six participants, called “home teams,” are formed with attention to self-reported racial and gender identity representation and a mix of self-reported communication styles. These interdisciplinary groups increase exposure to new perspectives while providing some level of privacy to share experiences with those they are less likely to know outside of the seminar.

In general, the seminar accepts a balanced number of GSIs from STEM, humanities, and the social sciences. In 2019, DIT included participants from a range of departments such as Anthropology, Neurology, Women’s Studies, and Civil Engineering, all working in different teaching contexts. To address this, participants also work in disciplinary teams on

context-specific exercises that apply what they have learned in the seminar to their students' needs. This includes discussions and reflections on educational culture, assumptions, challenges and opportunities specific to their disciplinary fields. It also promotes the development of collegial relationships with others in similar fields who are motivated to center DEI in their teaching.

Program Content and Structure

The organization of DIT's curriculum is informed by IGR's four-stage model of Intergroup Dialogue: (1) forming and building relationships; (2) exploring differences and commonalities of experience; (3) exploring and discussing current conflicts; and (4) action planning and alliance building. The seminar starts with exercises that require minimal risk and focus on individual reflection. Once trust is built among the participants and facilitators, the stakes are gradually increased and the focus extends outward (Maxwell and Thompson 2017). The following sections describe the scaffolded content and goals of the seminar along with examples of activities.

Stage One: Forming and Building Relationships. This stage focuses on building personal relationships among the GSIs and with facilitators, and beginning to critically consider what the term "inclusive teaching" really means. It involves establishing group norms and calling on participants to think deeply about their own assumptions and motivations relative to DEI. Part of this includes reflecting on one's own communication style, and practicing skills such as inquiry and active listening.

An activity done during this stage is the establishment of community guidelines. Guidelines create the foundation upon which trust and vulnerability can be built so GSIs can

more fully participate in the seminar while minimizing potential harm. Participants are given pre-constructed guidelines and asked to modify them to best meet their individual needs and the needs of their home team.

Stage Two: Exploring Differences and Commonalities of Experience. Once the foundations of community have been established, GSIs are encouraged to explore how social context (for example, stereotypes, inequity, political climate, access to resources) and identity shapes their experiences, assumptions, and understanding of self in the teaching-learning environment. They then consider how these factors can also impact student experience and learning in their classroom. Participants are introduced to best practices for productively engaging student differences in the design and instruction of their courses, including approaches to getting to know the needs of their students.

During this stage, GSIs develop an intake survey for students in a course they might teach in the future. The activity begins with brainstorming why an intake survey may be useful in designing an inclusive course (for example, physical space needs, communication styles, language of origin, group formation). Participants then break into their disciplinary teams to talk about the unique needs of their fields (for example, lab requirements, group projects) and consider any additional information they would like to know about their students. Finally, they are asked how they would use this information to design an inclusive course.

Stage Three: Exploring and Discussing Current Conflicts. In this stage, participants build on the proactive best practices for course design and facilitation covered in the first two stages, and consider how to respond to moments of tension or conflict that might occur in a teaching-learning space. Participants are asked to reflect on their own cognitive,

emotional, and physiological responses to these conflicts and identify which kinds of conflict are most challenging for them to handle. They are then introduced to communication techniques that encourage dialogue, including the Listen, Affirm, Respond, Add Information method (LARA; Tinker 2001) and practice applying these principles to practical situations.

An activity that engages these skills is the use of customizable case studies.

Participants are provided with a set of scenarios drawn from real classroom experiences where conflict surfaces, including students challenging the instructor's authority, discrimination or concerning language, and other challenging behaviors. In their home teams, using what they have learned in the seminar, they answer prompting questions, including:

- Who and what are you primarily concerned about in this moment?
- How might you respond to this situation? In the moment? After the fact?
- How does this scenario raise issues about power and authority?
- Which of your own identities were you most aware of in considering this scenario?

Each team shares out their thoughts, followed by a large group debrief. Finally, individuals reflect on how their own identities and experiences lead them to various responses.

Stage Four: Action Planning and Alliance Building. The final stage of DIT focuses on synthesizing the skills, knowledge, and awareness gained in the seminar and making plans for implementing change in future teaching. In disciplinary teams, participants create "Teach Back" posters about specific topics covered in the seminar, then circulate and add insights, questions, and notes. The activity concludes with the entire group discussing the posters—

identifying challenges, asking one another for additional strategies, and unearthing motivation for positive change.

The closing activity of the seminar reaffirms community building by tossing a ball of yarn from one person to the next as commitments and requests for support are shared, with each person holding onto a length of the yarn. The result is a physical representation of the web of connection amongst the GSIs and facilitators; a powerful reminder that working together as a community creates change greater than that of any one individual.

Program Evaluation and Impact

Over the last fifteen years, the success of DIT has been measured and affirmed in a variety of ways: continued interest/demand, self-reported evaluations, word of mouth, and institutional support. Part of DIT's success is due to the iterative and responsive nature of the program to incorporate: new research in teaching and learning, changes in national and campus climates, and the evolving needs of GSIs preparing for faculty careers. Responses from participant evaluations from the last five years indicate overall satisfaction at 90% and above (N=99). In 2019, qualitative feedback from participants demonstrated the success of the transformative approach in shifting mindset. When asked what they found most valuable about the seminar, responses included:

- “Introspection about my own values, responses, identities, etc. Very useful for thinking about how I respond in the classroom, how I can craft my classroom, etc.”
- “Thinking through our own privilege, how to combat injustices we may see/experience in the classroom, strategies to combat stereotype threat, how to have an inclusive syllabus.”

- “I liked that the seminar created a community and will continue to be a resource for us.”

When asked how they will implement what they learned in DIT, responses included:

- “To be more intentional, to be more experimental, to be transparent with students.”
- “From my values, I will practice building community in class while trying to make content relevant to their lives. Be thoughtful about what goes into syllabus, challenge dominative narratives and think about multi-partial facilitation.”
- “I will reflect on my identity further and how it impacts my teaching and use communication and community building/care techniques.”

Overall, participants reported gains in sense of self-awareness, productively engaging with student social identity, skills in designing inclusive curricula, and confidence in balancing power and handling conflict in the classroom.

Reflections and Recommendations

The descriptions in this chapter are not meant to be prescriptive. Readers are encouraged to consider the DIT model in their own context and adapt the ideas and intentions presented herein to meet the needs of their students, community, and particular educational goals. For those who want to implement some of the elements of this program, consider the following:

1. What are the needs of graduate and professional students in your institutional context?
At U-M, there were already many introductory workshops available, and GSIs needed an advanced and in-depth program.

2. What institutional priorities support work in DEI on your home campus? The missions and goals of CRLT, IGR, and Rackham align with the focus of DIT. U-M's five-year (2016-2021), campus-wide DEI initiative provides additional mission-driven support for the seminar.
3. What are the key partnerships that would lead to the success of a program? With DIT, the partnership between the three offices supports the development of high-quality curriculum, experienced facilitation, passion for the work, and the institutional support for advertising to graduate students and recognition of DIT participants.

Finding the support and resources needed to run an advanced program like DIT can be challenging but worth it. If done thoughtfully, participants and facilitators can gain hope for true change in the way that the academy thinks about and addresses the diversity of learners engaged in higher education; a community of passionate, thoughtful and gifted colleagues; and additional skills and energy to work toward social justice and inclusive practices that benefit GSIs and their students alike.

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Table 1: Informative vs. Transformative Approaches.

	Informative	Transformative
Location of knowledge	Instructor	Instructor and participants
Direction of knowledge	Instructor to participants	Between/across all participants and instructors
Frequency of interaction	Usually one session programming	Multi-session programming
Type of knowledge valued	Academic knowledge valued above all other types of knowing	All forms of knowledge/knowing are valued (academic, experiential, tacit, affective, reflective)
Value on content vs. process	Content valued above process	Content and process valued equally
Social identities and power structures are intentionally	Unlikely	Yes

surfaced		
Desired outcome	Knowledge of instructor is accepted, retained and replicated by students	Students and instructor surface ambiguity, challenge assumptions, broaden perspectives, and build relationships toward a co-created expansion of knowing and being/acting

Adapted from: The Program on Intergroup Relations 2007.

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