

## Resource Guide

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### Considerations for Culturally Responsive Online Course Design

Culturally responsive course design practices for online courses validate different ways of knowing and attend to the learning needs of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Heitner and Jennings, 2016; Woodley et al., 2017; Gay, 2018). Incorporating these practices into the design of your online course creates equitable, inclusive learning opportunities and enables students to consider the human dimension of learning by validating their own values and lived experiences in relation to others. Consider the following course design practices to promote and maintain a culturally responsive online learning environment:

- **Incorporate diverse perspectives when engaging students with course content and materials:** It's important to be aware of whose knowledge base is being represented in your course readings and materials (Woodley et al, 2017). Are your readings and materials reflective of scholars from diverse backgrounds and methodologies? Whose voices are included? Whose voices are left out? Engaging students with diverse materials highlights the value of different perspectives and enables students to see themselves represented in your course content.
- **Select equitable course learning tools:** Online courses increasingly use a range of tools to engage students, yet these tools may introduce inequities based on geographic location or Internet access. YouTube and Google, for example, are often restricted outside of the United States and slower Internet connections may impact the ability of students to load pages and videos, or complete specific learning activities. Blogs and social media tools also raise privacy issues and concerns for students who may not be comfortable sharing personal information in open forums or creating a public profile. Consider distributing a pre-course survey or gathering feedback from students throughout the semester to identify their unique situational factors.
- **Design inclusive online assessments:** Multiple-choice and true/false exam formats may unfairly disadvantage students from different cultural backgrounds by making them spend more time understanding the use of a word or phrase in a question prompt (Chavez and Longerbeam, 2016, pp. 180-181). Focusing on your course learning objectives might allow you to develop alternative assessments that enable all students to demonstrate their learning in an inclusive manner. Instead of a timed-online quiz, could students submit a blog, video demonstration, or portfolio project to demonstrate their completion or mastery of a specific objective?

## Resources

Chavez, A. F. and Longerbeam, S. D. (2016). *Teaching across cultural strengths: A guide to balancing integrated and individuated cultural frameworks in college teaching*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.

Heitner, K. and M. Jennings. (2016). Culturally responsive teaching knowledge and practices of online faculty. *Online Learning* 20(4), 54-78.

Woodley, X. M., Hernandez, C., Parra, J., and Negash, B. (2017). Celebrating Difference: Best Practices in Culturally Responsive Teaching Online, *Tech Trends*, 61(10), 470-478.

Gay, G. (2018). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* [3<sup>rd</sup> edition]. New York: Teachers College Press.

*For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center by [email](#).*