GROW: An Equity-Minded Framework to Support the Integration of Equity and Inclusion in Learning

2020 brought awareness to many issues surrounding equity and inclusion across the nation. In colleges and universities around the country, open forums on systemic racism and gender bias allowed new voices to shine through and strategic plans on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) to be reimagined. A common theme that has emerged from these discussions is the critical need to effectively integrate equity and inclusion into the teaching and learning environment. As equity-minded institutions, we have a responsibility to not only meet our students where they are at, but also our faculty. Thus, we developed a framework that provides faculty with a self-paced journey toward equity-mindedness. The GROW framework engages faculty through a collection of "seeds" (i.e. easy to implement practices in equity and inclusion) that can be integrated into an assignment, project or course based on the existing DEI skillset of the instructor. To accomplish this, the GROW framework operates via four guiding principles that allows faculty to focus their efforts more effectively in integrating equity and inclusion into the teaching and learning environment. These principles include: Grow relationships, Reimagine representation, Optimize learning through accessibility and Work toward awareness and self-reflection.

Embedded within each of these principles are a collection of research-backed "seeds" that are optimized to support instruction in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. A summary of the GROW framework can be found below.

1. **Grow Relationships** – Relationships represent the foundation upon which an inclusive classroom climate sits. Such relationships include both faculty-student and student-student interactions. Additionally, relationships are drastically affected by the expectations that are communicated and modeled throughout the course. Thus, the first principle is aimed at establishing a "learner-centered" classroom climate by promoting meaningful positive relationships.

   a. **Seed 1**: Establish a mechanism for students to regularly "check-in" (Ambrose et al.; Barr; Weimer)
   b. **Seed 2**: Set clear and achievable expectations (Ambrose et al.; Bain)
   c. **Seed 3**: Take time to learn the preferred names and personal pronouns of students (Grimm; Lee et al.)
   d. **Seed 4**: Develop low stakes group work that encourages discussion on topics inside and outside the classroom (Ambrose et al.; Barr; Weimer)

2. **Reimagine Representation** – The content of courses often helps shape student autonomy and professional identity. As Ambrose et al. states, "content can affect learning through cognitive, motivational, and socioemotional mechanisms because it determines what is and is not learned and how meaningful the material and the field are to students". Ultimately, course content holds tremendous power in allowing students to see themselves in the field as successful contributors.

   a. **Seed 1**: Select course content from authors with diverse backgrounds (Ambrose et al.; Hockings; Lee et al.)
   b. **Seed 2**: Allow students the opportunity choose a topic of interest for at least one project or assignment in the course (Bain)
   c. **Seed 3**: Showcase images and examples in lecture materials that highlight the rich and diverse representation in your discipline (Ambrose et al.; Hockings; Lee et al.)

3. **Optimize Learning Through Accessibility** – Oftentimes, we talk about a "personalized" approach to learning or a need to "meet students where they are". Such approaches aid in reducing equity gaps that exist within diverse student populations. Building meaningful relationships is one element to addressing this issue. Another important element is recognizing the diversity in learners' abilities and providing multiple ways to enhance the learning experience for these students.
   a. **Seed 1**: Use the "Plus-1" approach to evaluate at least one assignment or lecture to incorporate Universal Design for Learning strategies (Tobin)
   b. **Seed 2**: Caption recorded lectures and/or generate transcripts
   c. **Seed 3**: Evaluate academic technology used in class for its potential to create barriers to learning for students.

4. **Work Toward Awareness and Self-Reflection** – It is important for faculty to recognize that the journey toward equity and inclusion in classrooms is not instantaneous. It requires that we be aware of any constraints that limit our ability to practice these inclusive principles and to reflect on how we can improve the overall learning experience for ALL students.
   a. **Seed 1**: Ground yourself by engaging with Project Implicit to better understand your own potential implicit biases
   b. **Seed 2**: Throughout the semester, reflect on strategies to improve equity and inclusion in the classroom
   c. **Seed 3**: Take time to reflect on potential triggers you may encounter in the classroom and how best to respond

We believe the GROW framework will provide an effective means to meet faculty "where they are" as it relates to the integration of equity and inclusion in learning. As a work in progress, we are currently developing more "seeds" and a measurable implementation strategy that allows maximum participation of faculty. This will include a pre- and post- survey for engaged faculty, focus groups, awareness campaigns and development of a digital GROW learning community to support dissemination of information and faculty collaboration. Although not mandatory, use of the GROW framework is expected to heighten integration of inclusive and equitable practices. As this approach relies on continuous improvement, faculty are expected to be incentivized through no-cost professional development opportunities and institutional recognition. With a goal of implementing this framework in Fall 2022, we look forward to sharing our experiences with this equity-minded framework to support faculty and student success.

References

Ambrose, Susan A., Michael W. Bridges, Michele DiPietro, Marsha C. Lovett, and Marie K. Norman. *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2010.

Astin, Alexander W. *What Matters in College: Four Critical Years Revisited.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993

Bain, Ken. *What the best college teachers do*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Barr, Jason. "Developing a Positive Classroom Climate." The IDEA Center (October 2016): 1-9.

Felten, Peter, John N. Gardner, Charles C. Schroeder, Leo M. Lambert, Betsy O. Barefoot. *The undergraduate experience: Focusing institutions on what matters most*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016

Grimm, Joe (ed). *To my professor: Student voices for great college teaching*. Canton: Read the Spirit, 2016.

Hockings, Christine. *Inclusive Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: A Synthesis of Research*. York: Higher Education Academy, 2010.

Lee, Amy, Robert Poch, Marta Shaw, and Rhiannon Williams. *Engaging Diversity in Undergraduate Classrooms: A Pedagogy for Developing Intercultural Competence*. ASHE Higher Education Report 38, no. 2. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2012.

Project Implicit, accessed January 5, 2021, https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/.

Seymour, Elaine and Nancy M. Hewitt. *Talking about leaving: Why undergraduates leave the sciences*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997.

"UDL on Campus," Universal Design for Learning in Higher Education, accessed January 5, 2021, http://udloncampus.cast.org/home.

Weimer, Maryellen. *Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice*. Second Edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013.