**Planning Worksheet for Inclusive & Equitable Teaching Online**

With each issue of the Online Teaching Coaching Newsletter Summer Series, you’ll be provided with a planning worksheet so that you can apply the tips and best practices for inclusive & equitable teaching presented in the newsletter issue to your online course plans. In each planning worksheet, we suggest some best practices as possible examples for you to use in your online course. The list of examples is not exhaustive and we encourage you to try one or more of these examples when planning your course, or use them as a jumping off point for your own further research.

**CREATING COMMUNITY**

***Download this document to use it for your planning!***

Reflect on your online course design and teaching and what you do to create community in which students feel welcomed and a sense of belonging. Use this worksheet to identify practices & plan activities that you already use or that you wish to explore.

| **Reflection Questions for Creating Community (using CARE Framework)** * **C:** How can you create community and social presence in your online or remote course to benefit all of your students?
* **A:** How can you give students more agency in your online course?
* **R:** How can you create an online course that represents and affirms all of your students?
* **E:** How can you enable all of your students to equally access and benefit from your course’s learning experiences?
* **Pedagogies of Care:** What are ways to show in your course that you care about your students, about their learning, success and well-being?
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| **Identify & Plan for Inclusive & Equitable Teaching Online*** Review the listed examples of best practices for creating community online, using the CARE framework (Saltarelli & Yegnashankaran, 2020, 2021). Then consider & plan various ways you may incorporate these instructional practices to create a welcoming, inclusive, and equitable community in your online or remote courses.
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| **Use the CARE Framework to Create a Welcoming, Inclusive and Equitable Community in Your Online or Remote Course** According to the **CARE Framework** developed by Saltarelli & Yegnashankaran (2020, 2021), there are five dimensions of an inclusive and equitable online community; the importance of each dimension for student learning is briefly described below: 1. **Community.** Research shows that social connections tap into the emotional dimensions of learning and are key to helping students find belonging.
2. **Agency.** Students benefit when they have a choice to decide their learning. Giving your students agency means having students co-create in your classroom. This can extend into letting your students choose how to learn, engage with their peers, and demonstrate their learning. Agency also fosters independent thinking and self-efficacy among your students.
3. **Representation.** The course materials we use can shape how our students learn. It is crucial to pay attention to the implicit signals or representations of our teaching materials. Learning and belonging of underrepresented or marginalized students are most likely to be impacted in a classroom that does not represent or affirm their experiences, and who they are.
4. **Equal Access.** Research shows that barriers to online and remote learning disproportionately impact underrepresented student populations. Ensuring equal access means all students can access course materials in multiple modalities, without financial or technological barriers. To ensure access, courses need to provide a well-organized, clear path for learning; students also need to have multiple ways to seek your help.
5. **Pedagogies of Care.** During this past pandemic year, educators have turned to practices for [**trauma-informed instruction**](https://www.understood.org/articles/en/what-is-trauma-informed-teaching)**,** [**compassionate teaching**](https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/Stearns-Center-Compassionate-Teaching-Online-28NOV2020-_FM_.pdf), and [**pedagogies of care**](https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-classroom-management/reimagining-classroom-community-assessment-and-our-own-self-care/) to support student learning and well-being. Studies of these teaching approaches show that student motivation, resilience, and persistence to learn are enhanced when instructors demonstrate that they care about their students.

In this Planning Worksheet, we will share practices for how to create welcoming, inclusive and equitable community online. You will recognize many of these practices from our previous newsletter issues. **That’s because community involves all aspects of inclusive, equitable, and accessible teaching, including Universal Design for Learning.** You’ll also find many of these practices detailed in the Stearns Center Digital Learning’s *Quality Assurance Checklist and Guidelines for Online Courses* (available by request from **Stearns Center Digital Learning Quality Assurance Team**).  |
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| **Examples of Practices to Apply CARE Framework Online** ***Examples to Create & Foster COMMUNITY**** **Communicate early and often.** Post regular announcements in Blackboard. Communicate one-on-one with your students if possible, using synchronous tools. Frequent communication allows you to know your students and vice versa.
* **Welcome your students!** Before the course begins, send a Welcome Email to your students, introducing yourself, and letting them know the expectations for the course. When the course begins, post Welcome Message and/or Welcome Video in Blackboard, sharing your enthusiasm and encouraging students to contact you with any questions or concerns. Continue to share welcoming greetings to your students for each class session and/or week of the course.
* **Provide online spaces for informal interactions.** Create a *“Café”* or *“Watercooler”* Discussion Forum in your Blackboard course for informal, non-course-related chats among students.
* **Foster a community of support.** Create a *“Does Anyone Know”* Discussion Forum on Blackboard where students can ask each other course-related questions. Also include an *“Ask Your Instructor”* Discussion Forum, where students can post questions for you (instructor).
* **Break the Ice!** Choose some fun icebreaker activities to create bonds between you and your students, capture the attention of the class, and brighten the mood. At the start of the course, have your students share information about themselves in a class-wide icebreaker or other introductory discussion forum in order to build community. Continue using icebreakers any time throughout the semester, connecting icebreakers to class topics.
* **Use consistent activities to open and close a class session or module.** Use consistent opening/personal check-in activities for each module or class session in order to welcome students and also see how they’re doing. Use consistent closing/reflection/feedback activities to wrap up a module or class session.
* **Create multiple opportunities for your students to collaborate together** (*e.g*., in discussion boards, Blackboard groups). Having a combination of synchronous and asynchronous activities enables students to engage with their classmates through various means.
* **Recognize, acknowledge, and value students’ names, identities, and circumstances.** For remote learning in Zoom or Blackboard Collaborate Ultra, encourage students to list their preferred names, pronouns in their displayed name. For your own reference as instructor, manage this information by creating a spreadsheet with information including student names, what they preferred to be called, and their preferred pronouns. Include phonetic pronunciation of names to refer to in synchronous online sessions or virtual meetings.
* **Use inclusive language (we/our/us) to foster a sense of belonging and learning community.** For example, say “This week, we will be exploring” instead of “This week, you will be exploring”.
* **Demonstrate and model respect for your students, and find opportunities for student affirmation.** Use a respectful & authentic tone in all communications with students, take steps to invite participation by all students, and provide all with an inclusive learning atmosphere.

***Examples to Promote AGENCY*** * **Start with the syllabus!** Ask your students for their questions, contributions, and feedback about the syllabus at the start of the semester. Give students time to read the syllabus, to ask questions, and to provide their feedback.
* **Co-create class norms with your students.** Develop class participation agreements, group work contracts, and Netiquette guidelines collaboratively with your students, so that they feel a sense of ownership in their learning.
* **Empower students to advocate for their own learning.** Allow students the freedom to decide how to demonstrate their learning in the course by offering choices or options for different assignment formats, such written form or digital output (blog, podcast, or video).
* **Get student feedback during class.** Create prompts and use polling, feedback features (thumbs up/down, emoticons) and/or chat features in web-conferencing platforms (*e.g.,* Zoom, Blackboard Collaborate Ultra) for students to share their real-time feedback during class. In asynchronous online courses, feedback could be gathered from students at the mid-point and other appropriate points during the semester. Soliciting anonymous feedback will allow the collection of just-in-time data that could be useful to inform any changes in course design, course management, and teaching practices during the course. You may gather student feedback in your course using the [**Blackboard Survey tool**](https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Instructor/Original/Tests_Pools_Surveys/Create_Tests_and_Surveys).

***Examples to Provide REPRESENTATION*** * **Show diversity in your course content.** Include representation of diversity in course content. Most mainstream academic textbooks and curricula are tailored to the dominant cultural group. Include content, images, and media that reflect diverse identities, especially reflecting the identities of your students.
* **Include and acknowledge diverse contributions.** Include content acknowledging contributions of researchers, scholars, and scientists from minoritized or under-represented groups. Contact your [**Mason Subject Librarian**](https://library.gmu.edu/subject-librarians) for assistance in finding content.
* **Keep content current and relevant to all.**  Connect course material to students’ identities, cultures, communities, and real-world issues.
* **Pay attention to images posted to your course.** Images send powerful messages to your students. Ensure images and illustrations represent diverse appearances (*e.g.,* races, genders, abilities, ages, etc.). Avoid using symbols or imagery that might trigger stereotypes (*e.g.,* women performing housework, people of color in service positions).
* **Use supportive language that promotes a growth mindset.** Use inclusive language that focuses on assets and constructive actions for every student, not on assumed or perceived deficits.

***Examples to Provide EQUAL ACCESS**** **Offer multiple means to seek guidance or help.** Share multiple means for students to reach you with their questions *(e.g.,* via email, chat, *Ask Instructor* discussion forum or through virtual office hours).
* **Use mixed modalities** (*i.e.,* synchronous and asynchronous formats) to offer various modes of engagement for office hours, course activities, etc.
* **Make course materials financially and technologically accessible to students.** Make use of library reserve materials or adopt free, open-source, copyright-unrestricted online materials ([**Open Educational Resources, OERs**)](https://oer.gmu.edu/). Make course materials technologically accessible by ensuring they are mobile-friendly and by keeping file sizes small. For synchronous classes, consider turning off the default HD video in your Zoom settings to help those who might not have reliable bandwidth.
* **Apply Universal Design for Learning.** Include [**multiple means of engagement**](https://udlguidelines.cast.org/engagement), [**multiple means of representation**](https://udlguidelines.cast.org/representation), and [**multiple means of action & expression**](https://udlguidelines.cast.org/action-expression) in your course. Display course content in varied & accessible formats. Provide text, images, video, and audio to communicate the same information and content in different ways to students. Provide multiple ways for students to demonstrate what they have learned. Instead of focusing on traditional tests and assessments, consider alternatives for demonstrating knowledge (*e.g.,* group work, videos, demonstrations, portfolios, research papers, and presentations).
* **Make sure that course content is accessible.** Create accessible documents and presentations. Use [**Blackboard Ally**](https://ati.gmu.edu/caresguide/blackboard-ally-for-instructors/) to check accessibility of all posted documents and images. Provide closed captioned videos, transcripts, accessible images and PDFs. Contact [**Assistive Technology Initiative**](https://ati.gmu.edu) for help with accessibility of course content.

***Examples to Support “PEDAGOGIES OF CARE”**** **Be present in your course.** Let students know that you are present and that you care about their learning. Provide evidence to students that you were there, whenever you log in and check the Blackboard course.
* **Be flexible.** Build flexibility into your course design and course policies (*e.g.,* provide due date ranges; offer possibility to resubmit work; allow for a “life happens or free pass” for a certain number of absences or late submissions without requiring explanations or imposing penalties).
* **Support student health and well-being.** Show your commitment to support your students’ health and well-being. In your syllabus, include links to campus resources for health and well-being, including [**Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)**](https://caps.gmu.edu/), [**Student Health Services**](https://shs.gmu.edu/), [**University Life Well-Being Resources**](https://recreation.gmu.edu/well-being/university-life-well-being-resources/) and [**Center for Advancement of Well-Being**](https://wellbeing.gmu.edu/). Post regular announcements to your course, reminding students to practice self-care, especially during stressful times of the semester (*e.g.,* midterms, finals).
* **Reach out to students.** If you notice a student is not participating in your course or appears to be struggling with submitting their assignments, reach out to them via email. Check in with them to see how they are doing, to ask about their well-being and how you may help or support.
* **Familiarize yourself with signs of student distress.** Learn the steps you can take to support your students, and where to direct them to resources. To help you identify signs of distress, consider taking [**Mental Health First Aid**](https://wellbeing.gmu.edu/resources/mental-health-first-aid) training, offered regularly (free-of-charge) to Mason staff, faculty and students.
* **Practice self-care.** Remember to take care of yourself! You cannot help your students learn if you do not take care of your own health and well-being. ☺
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**Learn More about Creating Community**

* Saltarelli, A. and Yegnashankaran, K. (2021, July 14). [**Facilitating inclusive, equitable, and welcoming online learning.**](https://onlinelearningconsortium.org/webinar/facilitating-inclusive-equitable-and-welcoming-online-learning/) Webinar presented for [**Online Learning Consortium Summer Series 2021**](https://onlinelearningconsortium.org/learn/webinars/weareolc-summer-webinar-series-trending-topics-in-online-digital-and-blended-learning/). [Click on link to register and access the webinar recording; 56:46 min.]
* Saltarelli, A. and Yegnashankaran, K. (2020). [**CARE for inclusive, equitable, and welcoming online learning**](https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:b2a96605-59e1-4e40-996f-6e58e635464c)**.** Handout licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).
* Wehler, M. (2018, July 11). [**Five ways to build community in online classrooms**](https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/online-student-engagement/five-ways-to-build-community-in-online-classrooms/)**.** *Faculty Focus*, Magna Publications.
* Bagar-Fraley, B. (2020, May 8). [**Offering compassion and care in online courses**.](https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/offering-compassion-and-care-in-online-courses/) *Faculty Focus*, Magna Publications.

**Links to Mason Resources**

* Assistive Technology Initiative, George Mason University.
	+ [***Blackboard Ally for Instructors***](https://ati.gmu.edu/caresguide/blackboard-ally-for-instructors/)
	+ [***Creating Accessible RESources Guide (CARES Guide)***](https://ati.gmu.edu/caresguide/)
* Center for Advancement of Well-Being, George Mason University.
	+ [***Integrating Well-Being in Your Classroom***](https://wellbeing.gmu.edu/resources/integrating-well-being-in-your-classroom)
* Stearns Center for Teaching & Learning, George Mason University.
	+ [***Creating Inclusive Classroom***](https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/knowledge-center/student-engagement-classroom-managment/creating-inclusive-classrooms/)
	+ [***Compassionate Teaching Online***](https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/Stearns-Center-Compassionate-Teaching-Online-28NOV2020-_FM_.pdf)
* University Life, George Mason University.
	+ [***Well-Being Resources***](https://recreation.gmu.edu/well-being/university-life-well-being-resources/)

**Make sure to regularly check** [**Stearns Center website**](https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/) **for** [**online teaching resources**](https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/knowledge-center/online-teaching/)**, upcoming** [**webinars & workshops**](https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/programs/trainings/)**, and for** [**continuing professional development for teaching**](https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/programs/stearns-center-opportunities/continuing-professional-development/)**!**

| **Contact Us!** **Office of Digital Learning** | Stearns Center for Teaching and LearningPhone: 703-993-6200 | Email: **stearns@gmu.edu** Suite 412 Innovation Hall, Fairfax CampusGeorge Mason University |
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The CARE framework described in this Planning Worksheet is from Saltarelli, A. and Yegnashankaran, K. (2020). [**CARE for inclusive, equitable, and welcoming online learning.**](https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:b2a96605-59e1-4e40-996f-6e58e635464c)  Handout licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 International [**(CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)**.](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) ****

 **MY PLANNING NOTES**