Four Ways to Check Your Bias
Sheri Ann Huerta, Honors College / History and Art History

At the beginning of the semester, I use a mentimeter.com interactive anonymous poll in which students respond to the question, "What questions do you have about this course?" This gives students a chance to express their concerns at the beginning of the semester anonymously. Among the typical questions related to attendance policies, required textbooks, time requirements, and workload expectations, I received a question that simply stated, "Will having a different opinion affect our grade?" I wondered whether, in this era of political polarization, the student worried about being silenced or feeling pressures to "say what the teacher wants to hear."

Research shows that constructs of difference can be used as a gatekeeping tool in institutions like higher education through microaggressions, biases, negative stereotyping, or silencing. Perhaps the student wondered if I would value student experiences, ideas, and ways of knowing that might differ from my experiences, my world outlook, forms of information, or ways of navigating through life?

This student's question generated the impetus to reevaluate bias, assumptions about value in the classroom, and how these factors manifest as privilege in content, language, and assessment.

A first crucial step is for instructors to reflect upon this question of values that may be ever present yet unspoken in the classroom environment. In my own case, I wondered how my teaching practices might reflect my socialization, gender, sexual identity, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and access to upward mobility. Had I done the reflective work and training required to see where I had encoded my preferences and comfort level into the types of content that I deemed worthy of discussion, or if the formats for assessments I created privileged ways of knowing, or if my syllabus channeled access to only certain knowledge and forms of inquiry? This kind of introspective work and instructional review is necessary to recognize how syllabus-creation and lesson planning involved decisions that created layers of gatekeeping that can impact a student's sense of belonging in the educational process.

I then explored three more ways to check bias in the learning environment. One is to **evaluate who you ask your students to read** in your syllabus, how students engage with content, and whether you silence views and voices by privileging other perspectives in the course content. Do authors and voices in the syllabus reflect our diverse student body? Have I included voices from positions of power as well as subaltern voices? Have I included information in an array of formats and entry points?

Next, take time to **assess the classroom environment**. Have I provided space in class for students to share their thoughts in a way that welcomes and values their contributions? Do I actively seek out recommendations or suggestions? Do I regularly access how well the learning environment welcomes and respects student contributions, ideas, connections, and insights?

Finally, take time to **reassess the forms of evaluations** for biases and privilege. How is grading used to perpetuate inequalities in education? Have I designed assignments that only seek to replicate my voice (or the voice of a one perspective or group) or do I create assessments that amplify the student voice as the voice of agency and expertise?

Creating space for listening to student concerns offers important ways to reevaluate teaching practices. In this case, taking action meant addressing unconscious bias in the course design and increasing pathways to empower student voice and belonging in the learning environment.