Diversity and Social Justice
How to Train Student Leaders on Diversity and Social Justice

Enhanced awareness about diversity and social justice topics is one of the most important things that student leaders will gain during their time on campus. It can help them create more inclusive organizations, better understand their own diversity and the experiences of others, be sensitive and respectful, and so much more. Exploring diversity and social justice topics with your student leaders will give them lifetime skills and awareness that will impact every angle of their lives.

Training Topics

As you're training student leaders on diversity and social justice topics, consider addressing…

- What Makes Up Campus Diversity
- Being Inclusive: Creating Inclusive Organizations and Using Inclusive Language
- Implicit Bias
- Marginalized Groups and Privileged Groups
- Understanding Social Justice Issues
- Intersectionality
- Microaggressions
- Cultural Appropriation

Student Leader Angles

When it comes to discussing diversity and social justice issues during training sessions, consider emphasizing these student leader angles…

- **You'll sometimes stumble.** Raising your awareness about multi-layered topics like diversity and social justice means that you’ll be doing the work — and not always succeeding! There will be stumbles along the way…
  - When you say something that another person perceives as a microaggression
  - When you’re not as inclusive as you could be
  - When you question your response later, once you’ve had time to think about it
- **You won’t be perfect,** and that’s not the expectation. Instead…
  - Educate yourself
  - Be open to feedback
  - Learn from missteps
- **Explore and appreciate your own diversity.** By doing so, you’ll…
  - Be more in tune with your background, areas of pride, areas of struggle and more
  - Be better able to appreciate the diversity within others
  - Have an enhanced sense of self

Campus-Specific Topics

- Your institution and organization’s commitment to diversity
- Campus-based statistics about race, gender, etc.
- How to report incidents of bias
- Recognized holidays and awareness months/weeks/days
“Diversity is about all of us, and about us having to figure out how to walk through this world together.”

– Jacqueline Woodson
Students are coming from a wide variety of perspectives when they step foot on campus. They may be concerned about finding a community of like-minded people. They may be looking to broaden their worldview. They may be searching for services to support them.

Diverse perspectives are what make our campus rich and interesting. So, be prepared to welcome these varied students and perspectives into your organization by keeping an open mind and warmly welcoming all.

**Creating an Inclusive Organization**

- Make sure programs and other initiatives don’t coincide with specific religious or cultural observances that may exclude some members of the group.
- Ensure that initiatives don’t reflect stereotypes or harmful assumptions about any ethnic, religious or political group; lifestyle; sexual orientation; ability; gender, etc.
- Check that decorations at events don’t perpetuate stereotypical thoughts or media images. Instead, they should be welcoming and inviting.
- Have your programming calendars include different cultural and religious holidays.
- Make sure publicity doesn’t use or depict people by stereotypes, nor is it exclusive to just one group.
- Well-research initiatives that involve cultural traditions and have them accurately reflect the highlighted cultures.
- Use inclusive language that does not assume anything about anyone (i.e. family structure, romantic relationships, etc.). See next page for some examples.
- Ensure that initiatives don’t promote heterosexism, transphobia or homophobia.
- Utilize a variety of ethnic names when providing examples.
- Make sure initiatives take place in a location and are presented in a format that is accessible to students of all ability levels.
- Confront and halt the use of negative slang and phrases.
- Don’t use humor in a way that humiliates a single group or individual.
- Invite as many students as possible to your various group initiatives.

Keep in mind that searching for a sense of inclusion and belonging can be a potent force among students. They want to belong to something bigger than themselves, whether it’s a group of close friends or an organization in which they take pride. Providing positive ways for them to find that sense of inclusion within your group will ultimately help both them and your organization.
Using Inclusive Language

Not all students come from two-parent families or have siblings. Not all are in relationships. Not all have the same sexual orientation. Some have children of their own. Not all went directly from high school to college. Some are sensitive about their body image. Not all believe in God.

Assumptions can serve to exclude people, rather than include them. That’s why one of the key ways to be inclusive is to use language that helps people feel like they matter and belong, while also being appreciated for their differences. It shows that you value, accept and respect them. For example…

• Don’t just use student culture references that apply to traditional-aged students. Adult student learners may feel excluded if you do.

• Make every attempt to use preferred pronouns if people share their preferences, as this can be an important part of their identity.

• Infuse names from different cultural backgrounds when providing examples or case studies.

• Don’t assume that everyone comes from two parent households. And don’t assume that everyone has both a mother and a father.

• Don’t comment on people’s bodies directly or indirectly. You never know who may be struggling with body image issues.

• When talking about someone in a position of influence, don’t always use male pronouns. And don’t always use female pronouns when referring to “traditionally female” positions.

• Don’t assume that an averted gaze is a sign of disinterest or disrespect. Direct eye contact is considered disrespectful by some cultures.

• Don’t rely on “people-harming humor” to get an easy laugh.

• Make sure that when you talk about siblings, you also include only children in the conversation.

• Don’t assume all romantic relationships are heterosexual. Figure out comfortable language that includes all types of relationships.

• Use examples from a variety of religions and don’t take it as a fact that everyone believes in a higher being.

Inclusive Messaging

Do an audit of your office surroundings to determine whether you’re being inclusive. Take a look at things such as...

- Books on display
- Posters on walls
- Items on bulletin boards
- Door decorations

Also, look at your social media messaging through this filter. Being inclusive is about our actions, our words and passive items, too.
Implicit bias is when deep-seeded attitudes and stereotypes impact our actions, our decisions and our understanding, without us being conscious that it’s happening. This subconscious bias can impact how we feel about people based on race, ethnicity, appearance, age and other factors, according to the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at The Ohio State University.

Key Characteristics

Here are five key characteristics from the Kirwan Institute…

1. “Implicit biases are pervasive. Everyone possesses them, even people with avowed commitments to impartiality such as judges.

2. Implicit and explicit biases are related but distinct mental constructs. They are not mutually exclusive and may even reinforce each other.

3. The implicit associations we hold do not necessarily align with our declared beliefs or even reflect stances we would explicitly endorse.

4. We generally tend to hold implicit biases that favor our own ingroup, though research has shown that we can still hold implicit biases against our ingroup.

5. Implicit biases are malleable. Our brains are incredibly complex, and the implicit associations that we have formed can be gradually unlearned through a variety of debiasing techniques.”

Self-Work

Ready to challenge your biases? Consider checking out the Look Different campaign from MTV and Project Implicit (www.lookdifferent.org). They offer various tools, such as...

More on Racial, Gender and LGBT Bias – this section educates you on what it is, how it works and why it matters.

One thing I learned is…

(continued on the next page...)
**Self-Work (continued)**

**Discover Your Own Advantages** – this section allows you to explore your own advantages and disadvantages

   One thing I learned is...

**See That, Say This** – this section offers tips on making awkward conversations around heightened topics less awkward

   One thing I learned is...

**Implicit Association Tests** – this section explores implicit biases related to gender, race and sexual orientation

   One thing I learned is...

**A Bias Cleanse** – this section provides daily tasks aimed to help you begin to change your associations

   One thing I learned is...
The issues of marginalization and privilege impact a great number of things within your leadership life: who feels comfortable speaking up, who makes the rules, who may be trying to fit in, who has their truth and experiences questioned, and much more. Here are some of the key features of both groups to increase your awareness, so you’ll hopefully not marginalize others, be more aware of your own privilege and better understand the role that oppression can play.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marginalized Groups...</th>
<th>Privileged Groups...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have less access to power and resources</td>
<td>Define what is normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally assumed to be “less than,” “inferior” or “deficient”</td>
<td>Make the rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often feel the need to assimilate or to fit in; afraid to challenge the status quo</td>
<td>Have greater access to power and resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have their truth and experiences questioned and invalidated</td>
<td>Generally assumed to be “greater than” or “better than”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relegated to the outer edge of society/community</td>
<td>Given the benefit of the doubt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes challenged to find their voice or speak up</td>
<td>Sometimes feel they must defend themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very aware of oppression</td>
<td>Often unaware of privilege</td>
</tr>
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In order to understand the way privilege works, you have to be able to see patterns and systems in social life, but you also have to care about individual experiences."

– Dr. Peggy McIntosh in The New Yorker (5/12/14)

Social justice is a multi-layered topic to wrap our heads around, as it includes so many different aspects of the human condition. Those may include…

- Hunger
- Housing
- A living wage
- Women’s issues
- Equitable pay
- Environmental racism
- Poverty
- Access to clean, potable water
- Sanitation
- Maternal and child health
- Access to safe, affordable child care
- Availability of natural resources
- Third World debt
- Health care
- Insurance coverage
- Welfare reform

**Case Studies**

How does this apply to your student leadership role? Social justice issues impact people’s well-being and way of life, on both a global and a local scale. They impact the lives of students and others right on campus, as well as those not connected with your campus community. And people being impacted may come to you as a student leader, or you may become aware of their situations. Here are a few examples of social justice issues you may encounter...

**Unhealthy Housing**

Addie is a member of your student group who lives off campus. Lately, you’ve noticed her coughing quite a bit and looking pretty ragged. You express your concern for her health and Addie tells you that her asthma is really acting up, due to her living situation. Her apartment has mold and previously belonged to a smoker, so it’s really impacting her respiratory health.

When you ask her about moving, Addie gets emotional, saying, “I can’t find anything else that I can afford like this place. It may not be perfect, but I don’t have much to work with. It’s either this or living in my car.”

**Questions:**

- What social justice issue(s) is present in this situation?
- What might you do to help?
- What resources are available to help someone like Addie?
Understanding Social Justice Issues

Child Care Concerns

Peter is a single dad of a toddler. He is really interested in getting involved with your organization and comes to talk with you about it.

You let him know that your meetings are held every other Thursday at 7 pm. Peter grimaces a bit, telling you that it’s really difficult for him to find someone to take care of his daughter, especially at night. Babysitters are very expensive, he tells you, and he doesn’t have any family locally who can pitch in to help. He’s already having a hard enough time paying for child care during the day, so that he can attend classes.

Questions:

• What social justice issue(s) is present in this situation?
• What might you do to help?
• What resources are available to help someone like Peter?

Food Insecurity

After your group has major events or meetings where food is included, you notice that one of your group members, Han, subtly puts leftovers in plastic bags. She then stuffs the bags in her backpack, hoping no one will see.

A few other group members have seen this, too, and mentioned that they don’t think it’s fair for Han to get so many leftovers. When you bring it up to Han, she is very embarrassed and apologizes profusely. You tell her that there’s nothing to feel bad about — you just wanted to check in with her. Han then tells you that she is consistently hungry because she has little money to spend on food once she has paid for everything else that college requires. She tries to supplement it with “free food,” she says, but it’s still not enough. She knows being hungry is affecting her ability to learn and concentrate — she feels stuck and isn’t sure what to do.

Questions:

• What social justice issue(s) is present in this situation?
• What might you do to help?
• What resources are available to help someone like Han?
Intersectionality

We are all unique convergences of experiences and backgrounds that include gender, class, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, age, ability and more. These intersecting identities can make for complex combinations that impact the way we navigate and experience society, sometimes facing oppression in the process.

That’s why our campus inclusion efforts need to take intersectionality into consideration. No one person can solely be labeled “a gay man” or “a Latina woman.” Intersecting, often non-dominant identities, can lead some people to feel marginalized, stressed and challenged.

Here are some situations that illustrate how intersecting identities can have an impact:

- For a person with mobility issues (identity #1), getting to an off-campus psychiatrist to work on mental health concerns (identity #2) involves figuring out adequate transportation
- For a LGBTQIA+ person (identity #1) who is African-American (identity #2), it’s a real concern about who can they turn to for help coping with racism that they experience if their family members rejected them when they came out
- For a female (identity #1) coming from a low socio-economic background (identity #2), buying a suit for job interviews may be an economic hurdle that can impact employment

**Action Step**

Consider watching a TED Talk called “The Urgency of Intersectionality” (http://bit.ly/2fRHlTc) by Dr. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, a civil rights advocate, leading scholar of critical race theory, co-founder of the African American Policy Forum think tank and professor at Columbia Law School where she directs the Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies. Professor Crenshaw is the one who coined the term “intersectionality,” originally to explain the oppression of African-American women. This can be an excellent conversation starter and primer on the topic of intersectionality.

“**There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle, because we do not live single-issue lives.”**

– Audre Lorde

“Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It’s not simply that there’s a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LBGTQ problem there. Many times, that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things.”

– Dr. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, in an interview with Columbia Law School
“Microaggressions are remarks perceived as sexist, racist, or otherwise offensive to a marginalized social group,” according to Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (7/9/15). And they are more than just “insensitive comments,” as they often indicate an undercurrent of racism, sexism and other social tensions that can leave students feeling marginalized, unsafe or invisible.

In your role as a student leader, you can help lead the charge in improving our campus climate. To do that, it’ll help to explore what microaggressions are, the impact they can have, how to respond and how to reduce their occurrence.

Here are four things to consider…

**What Are Microaggressions?**

“Microaggressions are the brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual-orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group,” according to author Derald Wing Sue in the book *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation.*

Consider…

- What are some examples (see box)?

- What microaggressions have you seen, heard or experienced on our campus?

**Who Commits Microaggressions?**

“Anyone can commit a microaggression and everyone can be harmed by a microaggression,” said Dr. Maura Cullen during a webinar on “Microaggressions: A Campus Climate Conversation” (PaperClip Communications, 9/30/15).

Consider…

- Can a well-meaning person commit a microaggression?

- Who might be harmed by some of the examples we explored previously? How might these words impact them?

### Examples of Microaggressions

- “How did you get a C?? You’re Asian!”
- “Do you really think you should eat that?”
- “You’re very pretty for a black girl.”
- “I don’t believe gay marriages are real marriages.”
- “Has your counselor fixed you yet?”
- “Bisexual? They should call you ‘trysexual’ — you’ll try anything.”
- “Hello, girls!” (to a group of women)
- Exploring case studies where none of the names are diverse
Microaggressions

When Do Microaggressions Occur?

“Each event, observation and experience… is not necessarily particularly striking in and of themselves. Often, they are never meant to hurt — acts done with little conscious awareness of their meanings and effects. Instead, their slow accumulation during a childhood and over a lifetime is in part what defines a marginalized experience, making explanation and communication with someone who does not share this identity particularly difficult. Social others are microaggressed hourly, daily, weekly, monthly,” according to the Microaggressions: Power, Privilege, and Everyday Life blog.

Consider…

• How can the constancy of microaggressions impact someone?

• How might the setting in which a microaggression takes place impact someone’s action, reaction or inaction?

What Impact Do Microaggressions Have?

“Microaggressions are constant and continuing experiences of marginalized groups in our society; they assail the self-esteem of recipients, produce anger and frustration, deplete psychic energy, lower feelings of subjective well-being and worthiness, produce physical health problems, shorten life expectancy, and deny minority populations equal access and opportunity in education, employment, and health care,” wrote Wing Sue.

Consider…

• How might you react when someone says, “It’s not a big deal,” even though it feels like a big deal to you?

• If you commit a microaggression and it is brought to your attention, how might you react?

Sources: The Chronicle of Higher Education, 7/9/15; “Microaggressions” webinar, PaperClip, 9/30/15; Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation by Derald Wing Sue, 2010; Microaggressions.com