

## What Works for Students of Color

1. **Show your support:** If you've been to any cultural competency training on or off campus, why not say so in your syllabus? Students from targeted communities would love to know that you've taken the time to educate yourself. If you've earned a Lokahi pin, wear it!
2. **Include a non-discrimination clause in your syllabus.** You can use the college's or create your own, but state that discrimination and bias will not be tolerated in your classroom, and let students know you are available and open to hearing from them if they need your support.
3. **Intervene with any bias incidents:** Improve your own cultural competency so you know how to handle conflict around racial issues and turn them into teachable moments. Don't ignore comments just because a student "didn't mean to offend," "Didn't know better," or "Was only joking." Take the time to teach, inform, and increase understanding. This is the only way to reduce bias in the long-term. Additionally, students of color are looking for your support and leadership—your silence will be read as consent.  
See : "Managing Hot Moments in the Classroom" at <http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/html/icb.topic58474/hotmoments.html>
4. **Facilitate seating arrangements or group formations.** Students of color report that sometimes there are empty seats all around them in the class; they are the last picked for groups, and that they are excluded from study groups outside of class. Class and out-of-class connections are crucial to success. White students may not be openly biased but may just be uncomfortable with people different from themselves or not conscious of leaving seats between themselves and people of color. Students of color may be feeling vulnerable. Help students find diverse groups, and keep mixing them up over several class periods. Insist they sit next to different people every day for awhile. Students need help making these connections. Help structure opportunities for connection across diverse groups.
5. **Support study groups.** Research shows that successful students know how to get help from each other. Encourage study groups by teaching students about them; and as much as possible encourage diverse study groups. The DEC can help!
6. **Normalize help-seeking behavior.** Students from targeted groups may be reluctant to approach you. Paradoxically, it isn't that they don't care about the class; it may be that they want to seek your good opinion or prove they can "do it on their own." Start by teaching specific help-seeking behaviors, or making a practice of them: Make contact with every student who earned less than a B- on the latest paper or quiz to make sure they understand the material and what they can do differently. Invite students to your office hours or personally walk them there and show it to them with a

copy of your hours of availability. Show them where the math lab and writing center is. Make yourself available and show that you care about their success.

- 7. Learn about stereotype threat.** Current research shows that students who belong to groups that have been stereotyped are absolutely affected by the existence of the stereotype *EVEN WHEN THEY SAY THEY ARE NOT*. Another paradox: the more a student cares about doing well academically, the more anxiety about stereotypes can depress their academic performance—even subconsciously! (Read *Whistling Vivaldi* by Claude Steele or see <http://www.reducingstereotypethreat.org/> for more details and strategies).

The next three strategies have been proven to counteract this effect.

- 8. Emphasize that learning difficulties are normal.** Everyone has trouble when they encounter new material—everyone. Explicitly state that it is completely normal for all students, no matter what their race, gender, etc, to have a hard time when they first learn something. People who seem “naturally talented” or “smart” likely had more time to practice and access to resources and support, not a “better brain.”
- 9. Emphasize that intelligence is malleable and grows over time.** Students of color are more likely to have tested “low” on IQ or other standardized tests for a variety of factors—none of which are actually relevant to ability or intelligence (talk to the DEC for details). Science shows that the more students practice and learn, the more connections their brain is able to make: therefore, intelligence can grow over time and with practice. It is crucial that students internalize this concept to succeed, so find a way to be explicit about it!
- 10. Teach self-affirmation.** Researchers asked students to spend 15 minutes writing about their goals and values, then put the writing away in an envelope—and the students’ scores went up for THREE QUARTERS. Building in even short periods of time to have students reflect on what they do well, their goals, and what is important to them will pay off.
- 11. Have high expectations and provide high support.** Students don’t often respond well to simple praise, but they do often respond to “wise schooling”: Give feedback that affirms your belief in their abilities and include specific suggestions for improvement. Tell them you have taken the time to make recommendations for improvement because you believe they are capable of doing better. Don’t accept work below their potential, but don’t forget to reaffirm their potential with your feedback.
- 12. Mentor:** You can refer them to the DEC for an official mentor, but many students whom you connect to will look to you for support. Teach them how to be an “educated

person”: the most successful students see learning as something they do all the time, not as separate from their “real” lives. Encourage them to read the newspaper, attend campus events, get involved in student activities, cultural or community events that may be outside their comfort zones. Encourage their leadership; help them see study abroad opportunities or science careers as possibilities in their lives. Treat every student as if they might earn a PhD and become your colleague.

The DEC is available to support all these strategies! Check out our books and video collections, ask us for a workshop on Stereotype Threat, bring your class in to meet the DEC Team.

Thank you for your hard work and continued support!

## **TEACHING RESOURCES:**

**Teaching Diverse Students Initiative** <http://www.tolerance.org/tdsi/>:

The most effective teaching/retention strategies can often be borrowed and adapted by our colleagues in the K-12 system.

**Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning:**

<http://bokcenter.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k1985&pageid=icb.page29699>

**EdChange: Paul Gorski’s 10 Commitments of a Multicultural Educator:**

<http://blog.fedcan.ca/2011/05/20/equity-and-social-justice-from-the-inside-out-ten-commitments-of-a-multicultural-educator/#more-1531>

**and the EdChange website:** <http://www.edchange.org/>

**Campus Pride: Ask a question from LGBTQI Student leaders on the blog, or check out other resources:**

<http://www.campuspride.org/issues.asp>