

BUILDING AN EQUITY CULTURE: HOW YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE¹

In the spring of 1996, the Faculty of Arts hosted a 2-day forum and teaching workshop on *Building an Equity Culture*. The teaching workshop was conducted by Dr. Bernice Sandler, an internationally respected expert who has conducted research on strategies to warm the chilly classroom climate. Workshop participants engaged in focused discussion on how to improve the classroom climate for women and for individuals from diverse ethnocultural backgrounds.

As you prepare to return to the classroom, take a few moments to consider the following strategies that your colleagues have identified for avoiding discrimination and making the classroom more hospitable for all students.² These suggestions are offered to you with the following thought in mind: *"the process of learning affects the content of learning."*³

If we can make our classrooms anti-racist and anti-sexist; if we can foster the participation of students who might be diffident; if we can think more self-consciously about what we teach and how we teach it; if we work to avoid subtly encouraging some students while discouraging others; if we reflect on what we, as individual instructors, can do and what we can encourage within our institutions -- perhaps then we can create teaching and learning environments that enhance the experience of **all** faculty and students.

WHAT CAN PROFESSORS DO TO CREATE A POSITIVE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT?

There are many things that instructors can do to foster a positive teaching and learning environment. Keeping in mind the size and format of your classes, you might wish to consider the following:

As you prepare your syllabus:

- ◆ Reflect on your teaching orientation and pedagogical style, and then let your students know how you plan to teach the course (include this in your syllabus).
- ◆ Include women scholars as part of the knowledge base, but don't marginalize women's issues in class.
- ◆ Include women among any guest speakers invited to your classes.

Once your class begins:

- ◆ Talk about the issues of climate in class (there are several very good videos on the subject, some of which include resource guides that can be used to facilitate discussion).

- ◆ Familiarize your students with the University policies including:
 - ✓ *Faculty of Arts Students' Code of Responsibilities*
 - ✓ *Responsibilities of Academic Staff with Regard to Students Policy*

- ✓ *Human Rights Policy*
- ✓ *Sexual Harassment Policy*
- ✓ *Language Usage Policy*

- ◆ Set an example for your students by complying with these and other University policies.
- ◆ Familiarize yourself and your students with some of the resources and services on Campus that students may need to access:
 - ✓ *Student Resource Services* (520 University Centre, 474-9251) -- this branch of Student Affairs includes the chaplains, disability services, the English Language Centre, the Learning Assistance Centre, the Aboriginal Students Office, and the Play Care Centre
 - ✓ *Office of Student Advocacy* (519 University Centre, 474-7423)
 - ✓ *Equity Services Office* (513 Drake Centre, 474-7388) -- this office provides services in employment equity, conflict resolution, and advice and assistance with human rights and sexual harassment complaints and education
 - ✓ *University Health Service* (104 University Centre, 474-8411) -- this clinic provides health care to the University community
 - ✓ *Psychological Service Centre* (161 Dafoe Bldg., 474-9222) -- this centre provides therapy and counselling to individuals, couples, families and groups, with staff available to assist in crises, and on a walk-in basis
 - ✓ *Counselling Services* (474 University Centre, 474-8592) -- this centre provides counselling to students for personal, career, and academic issues

- ◆ Ask students to introduce one another in class.
- ◆ Try to learn the names of all of your students.

- ◆ Keep track of who talks (and as important, who does not talk), and what the nature of the talk is (do students raise their hands? do students interrupt the instructor? do students interrupt one another? how does interaction take place in class?).
- ◆ Be realistic about your expectations regarding student participation: expect participation over time, thereby allowing for individual differences.
- ◆ Use praise and feedback as a strategy to encourage students to learn and participate.

- ◆ Don't restrict the space you use; instead move around the classroom in order to reach out to all of the students in your class.
- ◆ Re-arrange physical settings to promote interaction.

- ◆ Use quizzes as a way to get students to talk about issues in small groups. This will also make students feel that they have contributed to the class.
- ◆ If using small groups, make sure that the responsibility for recording group interaction and discussion is rotated among class members.

- ◆ When you ask questions in class, don't always pick the first hand that goes up; instead, wait for other hands or call on individuals.
- ◆ Ask questions of all members of the class.
- ◆ Try to ensure proportional representation in calling on students. In some cases, it may be appropriate to make a special effort to call on women students and minority students.

- ◆ Single out individuals to perform tasks in class.

- ◆ When criticism is appropriate, phrase the issue in the form of a question (e.g., "Your answer doesn't take into account X." vs. "How would your answer be affected by X?").
- ◆ Intervene when negative behaviour is evident (for example, if suggestions or comments are made by both men and women, but only those offered by men are acknowledged, draw attention to this by picking up on the woman's comment and showing how it has been overlooked).

- ◆ Don't communicate lower expectations for women students and minority students.
- ◆ Treat the same behaviours in men and women in the same way and give the same kinds of information, praise and coaching to female and male students (the same applies to treating minority students like Caucasian students) -- ask critical thinking and factual questions of both women and men and of both minority students and Caucasian students.

- ◆ Use language that is inclusive, or minimally gender-appropriate (i.e., use language that includes men and women in the group; avoid using the generic "he"; refrain from using or condoning sexist or racist humour).
- ◆ Avoid excluding students.
- ◆ Make sure that students don't feel squeezed out by the classroom dynamics.
- ◆ Avoid stereotyping students.
- ◆ **Encourage all students.**

Throughout your class:

- ◆ Ask for feedback from students on the **process** of learning and the **content** of the course.
- ◆ Have students complete "one-minute" papers on issues as a way of identifying problem areas in both process and content.

- ◆ Monitor instructional materials for unequal and discriminatory arguments, illustrations, and content with regard to the depiction of women and ethnocultural minorities.
- ◆ Include women scholars and minority scholars as part of the knowledge base, but don't marginalize women's issues or ethnocultural issues in class.

- ◆ Update bibliographies making them more inclusive, and encourage students to pursue inclusive reading and research.

- ◆ Arrange to have your lectures videotaped so you can see how you teach, and make changes where they are needed. Consult with University Teaching Services (474-6894).

WHAT CAN THE UNIVERSITY DO TO BUILD AN EQUITY CULTURE?

- ◆ Promote continuing education related to pedagogy (including seeking administrative support for faculty development workshops).

- ◆ Look at the curriculum for diversity
 - ✓ Do the calendar descriptions for courses reflect what is taught? Do calendar descriptions acknowledge new scholarship? Should they?
 - ✓ Should new courses be introduced to make the curriculum in our departments

- ✓ and programs more inclusive?
- ✓ Check out the Clearinghouse for Inclusive Curriculum (on the UMGopher).
- ✓ Check out the Task Force on Women and Equity (on the Faculty of Education home page at www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/education/).

- ◆ Include climate issues in course and peer evaluations (e.g., Have you felt uncomfortable in this class because of your gender (race/ethnicity)? If so, how?).
- ◆ Bring women to the campus as specialty instructors or keynote speakers at colloquia.
- ◆ Make sure that University policies dealing with equity (language use, human rights, sexual harassment, etc.) are publicized. Make sure that members of the University community adhere to University policies dealing with equity.
- ◆ Keep equity in the decision-making processes of the University.
 - ✓ Are there biases in the processes for appointment, tenure and promotion?
 - ✓ How will equity concerns for staff (academic and non-academic) and students be affected by University restructuring?
- ◆ Foster mentoring through K-12/University alliances -- this can be especially significant in encouraging students to enter non-traditional fields (science and engineering for women and nursing for men).

- ◆ Ensure that an effective student orientation program is established that promotes anti-racism and anti-sexism.
- ◆ Make building an equity culture the work of Senate and other governing bodies of the University.
- ◆ **Encourage everyone to do the work of building an equity culture, with at least one person in each unit who can take on a leadership role.**

In their publication *Keeping Equity in the Decision-Making Process*, the Council of Ontario Universities Committee on the Status of Women and the Committee on Employment and Educational Equity concluded:

Equity and diversity are essential elements in excellence... If universities are places where we value diversity of thought, places where we want to encourage creative debate, then they must be places to which all people with the intellectual capacity and interest have equal access and in which there is equal opportunity.

Focusing on equity has not been at the expense of excellence but rather in the service of excellence. We have been attempting to increase faculty diversity not because of legislation but because we have wanted better institutions. We have focused on career development for administrative staff not only because this

will make our "employment equity" numbers look better, but because we want to ensure that everyone's full potential is realized. We have attempted to diversify our curriculum not because of "political correctness" but because we want to teach at the "cutting edge" of academic scholarship and to have our teaching reflect the needs of our students.

**BUILDING AN EQUITY CULTURE IS EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS.
PLEASE DO YOUR PART TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE!**

¹This publication was made possible with sponsorship from the Dean's Office, Faculty of Arts, with assistance from the University of Manitoba Employment Equity Incentive Fund and the Faculty Development Fund, and in cooperation with the Centre for Professional and Applied Ethics and the Margaret Laurence Chair in Women's Studies.

²Some of these strategies are included in the Concordia University publication *What Can Professors Do to Avoid Discrimination Against Women in the Classroom? (1993)*.

³Women in Higher Education, May 1996, p. 15.

**RESOURCES FOR IMPROVING
THE CLASSROOM CLIMATE**

Videos

Available from Educational Support Services (474-8163)

- ◆ *Inequity in the Classroom* (Concordia University, 1991)
- ◆ *The Chilly Climate* (University of Western Ontario, 1991)

Available from the Office of the Vice Provost (474-9051)

- ◆ *The Chilly Climate* (University of Western Ontario, 1991)
- ◆ *Backlash to Change: Moving Beyond Resistance* (University of Western Ontario, 1996)
- ◆ *Backlash to Equity: First Nations People Speak Out* (University of Western Ontario, 1996)

Available from the Dean's Office, Faculty of Arts (474-7321)

- ◆ *Building an Equity Culture* (Faculty of Arts, University of Manitoba, 1996)
- Video 1: *Teaching and the Chilly Climate: A Workshop on Strategies* presented by Dr. Bernice Sandler (National Association for Women in Education)
- Video 2: *Building an Equity Culture: From the Abstract to the Concrete* by Prof. Sheila McIntyre (Faculty of Law, Queen's University)
- Video 3: *Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech in Canadian Universities* by Mr. Alan Borovoy (Canadian Civil Liberties Association)
- Video 4: *Academic Freedom and Equity -- Two Solitudes?*, a panel discussion including Rosa Bruno-Jofre (Education), James S. Gardner (Vice President, Academic and Provost), Susan Heald (Women's Studies), and Arthur Schafer (Philosophy), moderated by Robert O'Kell (Dean's Office, Faculty of Arts)
- Video 5: *Can Equity Survive the Current Crisis in Post-Secondary Education Funding?* by Dr. Pamela Milne (Religious Studies, University of Windsor)

Resource Publications

Sandler, Bernice R., Silverberg, Lisa, and Hall, Roberta M., *The Chilly Classroom Climate: A Guide to Improve the Education of Women*. Washington, D.C.: National Association for Women in Education, 1996.

Sandler, Bernice R. and Hall, Roberta M., *The Campus Climate Revisited: Chilly for Women Faculty, Administrators, and Graduate Students*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges, 1986.

Sandler, Bernice R., *Success and Survival Strategies for Women Faculty Members*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges, 1992.

Solar, Claudie (ed.), *Inequity in the Classroom: A Manual for Professors and Adult Educators*. Montréal: Office of the Status of Women, Concordia University, 1992.

June 20, 1996

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3. Women in Higher Education, May 1996, p. 15.