

Creating an Inclusive Classroom Climate

2022-2023 | OFFICE OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION





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Note: If you need a plain-text, large-print, or otherwise accessible version of this document, email savannah.lynn@nyu.edu.



Community Expectations

Welcome to the Inclusive Classroom Climate informational guide, authored by the Diversity and Inclusion team at NYU School of Law. Within this guide, you will find tips and best practices that every community member can practice. We all have a role in creating a vibrant living and learning community.

It is expected that all members of the NYU School of Law community, including students, faculty, administration, and staff, assist in maintaining a living and learning environment in which everyone has the opportunity to flourish.

As reflected in the University Student Conduct Policy, New York University School of Law is an academic institution committed to the principles of “free inquiry, free expression, and free association.” The Law School is part of “a community where the means of seeking to establish truth are open discussion and free discourse” and one that “thrives on debate and dissent.” It is imperative that all members of our community feel included and encouraged to participate in this robust discourse.

Further, per the university policy on Academic Integrity for Students at NYU:

“[A] commitment to excellence, fairness, honesty, and respect within and outside the classroom is essential to maintaining the integrity of our community. By accepting membership in this community, students take responsibility for demonstrating these values in their own conduct and for recognizing and supporting these values in others.”

Language, Names & Pronouns

- Use contemporary language when referring to marginalized groups.
 - If class materials use outdated or offensive language, you should still use contemporary language when speaking about them.
- If a fellow student uses an outdated or offensive term, consider expressing to your peer in the moment or later that their choice of words was not appropriate, and suggest an alternate term.
- Language is constantly evolving. A word or term may impact different people in different ways. If you use a term that another student expresses to you is offensive, thank them for the feedback and adapt your language accordingly when speaking with them and beyond.
- [Add your pronouns and name pronunciation to Albert](#), as well as your Zoom account when engaging in virtual meetings or events.
 - Professors will receive a list of pronouns and name pronunciations of their students at the beginning of the semester based on what is in Albert, so make sure that yours are included!
- Ensure that you are always using your classmates' correct names and pronouns.
 - Misgendering (the act of calling someone by a name, pronoun, or term not associated with their gender identity), is an act of disrespect and intolerance.
- If you make a mistake, quickly apologize and endeavor not to make the same mistake again.
- Ensure that you are learning how to pronounce your classmates' names correctly, even if they are difficult for you at first. This is a basic way to ensure that your peers are respected.
- Never give someone a nickname or call them by a different name without their express permission to do so.

Diverse Perspectives

- A variety of intellectual perspectives and individual experiences is vital to NYU Law's culture of academic rigor and intellectual curiosity. All students should feel that they are able to share their personal connections to and experiences with academic topics in the classroom.
 - This *does not* mean that anyone should feel that they can express bigoted or hateful points of view without consequence.
- When such conversations arise, particularly around bias in the law, do not lean away from them unless engaging would be detrimental to your mental health and well-being at that time.
 - If you hold a non-marginalized identity relating to the topic, lean into the discomfort you may feel. This is where learning and growth happens.
 - At the same time, do not expect your peers to be the spokespeople on behalf of the identity groups that they may be a part of.
 - Examine your own reaction when issues of identity and bias come up in the classroom. Who are you looking toward to speak?
- When creating hypos during class discussion, remember to read the room and be sensitive to others' experiences. The hypo you are creating as a "worst-case scenario" may well be someone's lived experience.
- Ensure you are remaining respectful to your peers on group chats and servers, such as GroupMe, WhatsApp, Slack, Discord or email listservs. These can be invaluable resources, but can also be sources of conflict.
- If you are ever uncomfortable with something expressed by one of your peers or professors and do not feel it can be confronted in the moment, please contact any member of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion or report it to NYU's Bias Response Line.

Openness to Learning

- No one person knows everything about the vast diversity of identity groups that exist in our world and our NYU Law community. We are all constantly learning and growing, and our peers are invaluable sources of education and enrichment.
- Acknowledge openly the potential biases in your own perspectives or opinions. Having biases does not make you a bad person; it means that you are human, and that you have opportunity for growth.
 - Seek out opportunities for further training and education around the biases you identify.
- Consider what you are reading, watching, and playing outside of class. Are diverse identities and perspectives being represented? If not, consider branching out and trying a new television show, video game, or book.
- It is healthy to question and examine your own personally held beliefs and tenets, and even to change them when presented with compelling new information.
- If someone says something that does not align with your own perspective, take a moment to reflect where the difference might be coming from, and whether it is something you have considered before.

Difficult Conversations & Conflict Resolution

- It can be extremely nerve-wracking to be on the initiating or receiving end of a difficult conversation, particularly around charged topics. However, it is an invaluable skill for being a lawyer, and it comes easier with practice.
- If you are initiating the conversation:
 - Ask yourself what goals you have for the conversation. What are you trying to achieve? What would be an ideal outcome? Why are you trying to achieve this?
 - Consider what format you wish to have the conversation in. In person? Via email? Over the phone? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the format?
- If you are on the receiving end of a difficult conversation:
 - Keep in mind that your conversation partner clearly thinks you are worth investing time in, and you can use this as an opportunity to learn and grow, even if it is uncomfortable.
 - If it truly is not a good time, or your mental health/emotional well-being does not allow for an effective conversation, you can politely say “This sounds like a really important thing to talk about, and I want to make sure that I can give it my full attention, and I don’t think I am able to do that right now. Can we visit this again on [date and time]?”

Difficult Conversations & Conflict Resolution, cont.

- For all parties:
 - Consider: What assumptions have you made about the person you are speaking with? What assumptions do you think they have made about you?
 - Speak honestly and from the “I” perspective. Ask clarifying questions of your conversation partner, and welcome clarifying questions that they wish to ask you.
 - Ask questions about why someone feels the way they do, and really listen to the answer.
 - Acknowledge their statements and ask questions where appropriate. Acknowledgement does not mean agreement—you can acknowledge that someone feels something without agreeing with them on a particular point or belief.
- If someone says something in a groupchat or virtual medium that you are uncomfortable with, consider taking the conversation to a private message or offline/in person instead of responding directly to the chat.
- If you find yourself having an extreme emotional reaction during a difficult conversation, ask yourself a few questions:
 - How would you describe how you are feeling?
 - Why are you feeling this way?
 - Which of your buttons has been pushed?
 - What do you need in this moment?
 - How will you communicate your needs to your conversation partner?
- If you are interested in mediation or conflict resolution services, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion is able to facilitate either an informal conversation or a restorative conference.

The Art of the Apology

- Mistakes will happen and are a healthy part of the learning process. Though you may feel ashamed, defensive, or upset in the moment, it is important to engage with your mistake and apologize, to minimize damage to your relationship with your peer.
- If someone expresses to you that something you said is offensive or harmful, they are giving you an opportunity to grow. If you respond defensively or with anger, then people may not be willing to help you learn in the future.
- The three parts of a humble, healthy apology:
 - **Acknowledgement.** Comes from the “I” perspective. “I’m sorry that I used a term offensive to you.” “I apologize for using the incorrect pronoun to refer to you.” “I am very sorry that I spoke over you in class.”
 - **Remorse and empathy.** Expressing understanding that what you said or did was hurtful or incorrect. “I know that it hurt you deeply, and I regret that my mistake harmed you.” “This was a lack of education on my part, and I hate that I hurt you because of it.” “I know that this was not okay for me to do.” Do not deflect with statements like “I’m sorry you were hurt” or “I’m sorry you were offended.” These statements do not take accountability for the action, and instead place the onus on the other person for being upset.
 - **Restitution.** Resolving to do better in the future. “I will be reflecting on my behavior and will be more conscious when I speak in the future” “I clearly need to do some more reading about the issue so I can avoid causing harm like this again.”
- The secret fourth and fifth parts: do the work that you have resolved to do, and don’t expect immediate forgiveness or rebuilt trust. You are apologizing not to receive absolution, but because it’s the right thing to do.

Responding to Incidents of Bias

If you or someone you know has experienced an incident of bias, discrimination, or harassment, there are options at NYU to address the incident both formally and informally.

- File a report with the [Bias Response Line](#). You do not have to leave your name or any identifying information in your report, but make sure you say that the incident occurred at the Law School so that our administration is notified.
- You can also email the Diversity & Inclusion team directly to report an incident of bias or discrimination (find our contact info on page 10).
- After a report is filed or we receive your message, a member of the Diversity & Inclusion team will contact you with resources for support (if you included your name/email) and ask how you would like to proceed.
 - You are under no obligation to make a formal complaint or be further involved. The Diversity & Inclusion team will never take action based on a report without the permission of the reporter.
 - If you would like to seek informal resolution or have a facilitated conversation with the perpetrator of the bias incident, the Diversity & Inclusion team can coordinate these efforts.
 - If you would like to file a formal complaint and seek disciplinary action against the perpetrator of the bias incident, the D&I Office can assist with that process.

Bias Response Line: www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/equal-opportunity/bias-response.html

Further Resources

- NYU has a [variety of trainings](#) specifically for continuing education on how to be in solidarity with marginalized communities, including:
 - JusticeZone
 - UndocuZone
 - DisabilityZone
 - SafeZone
- [NYU Law Guide: Alternatives to Calling the Police](#)
- [Inclusive Language Guide](#)
- [How to avoid and address microaggressions](#)
- Office of Student Affairs - law.studentaffairs@nyu.edu
- Office of Diversity & Inclusion - law.diversity@nyu.edu

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