

Create an Inclusive Learning Environment

SourceCarnegie Mellon, Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence

where they feel free to be themselves, they often capitalize on their personal experience of having challenged conventional assumptions by engaging with the material in creative ways (Renn, 1998).

Climate communicates expectations upon students. This is relevant because people tend to perform in relation to the expectations placed upon them. When students perceive that the instructor thinks they are smart and capable, they meet those expectations. This is the Pygmalion effect (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992). Conversely, when students perceive that expectations placed on them conform to stereotypes (e.g., African American students are less capable), they will underperform, regardless of their actual capabilities. This is the stereotype threat effect (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Climate communicates power dynamics. In productive classes, instructors use their authority to empower everybody to take ownership in the learning process. Conversely, if some students or groups of students feel that their perspective is not represented in the readings, or is belittled when it is, they might withdraw from the class. The ultimate form of resistance for people who feel powerless in a hostile environment is the refusal to learn (Kohl, 1994).

Climate impacts student persistence. When the cumulative direct and indirect messages students perceive communicate that they are not as able as other students and don't belong in the course, students are less likely to stay in the course, the major, and even in the university (Tinto, 1993).

Strategies to create a productive and inclusive climate

Examine your assumptions. It is very common for instructors to assume that students share their own background, but this is not necessarily so. Do you find yourself addressing students as if they all share your religion, sexual orientation, or economic class? [Classroom assumptions and their impact on learning](#)

Strive to be fair.

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.