

Transforming Student Services Practices

Practices to Critically Engage Across Difference

Identify and Name Your Social Identities and Locations

- Persistently reflect on your social identities and locations in relation to systemic racism and oppression inside and outside your institution
- Acknowledge systemic inequities
- Identify your strengths and weaknesses

Be Anti-Racist, Anti-Ableist and Anti-Oppressive

- Learn about the trauma of systemic racism and oppression
- Support and validate students' intersectional identities
- Reduce students' social-emotional stress

Adopt An Intersectional Lens

- Recognize students as the subject matter experts in their own lives
- See students as individuals *and* acknowledge their intersecting identities and communities
- Honour a range of expression and communication

Examples of practices that align with this principle include:

- Effectively integrate strategies for communication and relationship building skills with students from equity groups
- Consider opportunities for respectfully integrating Indigenous perspectives and worldviews within the work of Student Services
- Consider opportunities to integrate anti-racist, anti-ableist, and anti-oppressive perspectives within your courses
- Understand microaggressions and how they might occur in both in-person and online environments; be ready to address them
- Effectively facilitate dialogue about issues of social justice, inclusion, power, privilege, and oppression in one's practice
- Actively increase your interpretation of culture beyond race, language, etc.
- Be vulnerable by acknowledging your desire to grow and learn and admitting you are still learning
- Examine systemic issues within your institution and develop programs and services that address them
- Diversify team members so that more perspectives are considered when making policies or providing supports

- Critically reflect on your roles and responsibilities in removing systemic barriers to student success; don't attribute disparities in outcomes exclusively to perceived deficits in students' identities, life circumstances, or capabilities
- Provide a cohesive list of services so students from diverse abilities or backgrounds can gain relevant, inclusive, and equitable access to all services they require
- Engage in continued personal research to better understand student service expectations for different cultures and identities
- Be mindful of other identities racialized students bring and be in service of those as well; don't make assumptions based on race
- Be transparent with your students — admit when you don't know something, and acknowledge you will make mistakes but you're willing, and working, to actively learn
- Provide opportunities to engage with racial and equity issues; give students tools to engage safely and productively
- Stay present in the dialogue; monitor it regularly and intervene when necessary
- Encourage students to design the solutions
- Offer information in various languages, including American Sign Language (ASL)
- Ask complex questions about other cultures/social identities, seek out and articulate answers to these questions that reflect multiple cultural perspectives

Practices to Shift Attitudes and Mindsets

Challenge Your Mindset

- Recognize that changing attitudes are key to changing actions
- Know equity-centred practices can help all students
- Integrate an inclusion mindset to foster innovation, performance, academic and personal success, opportunities, and well-being

Expand Your View of Students

- Reorient your view to students as co-learners
- Value students' diversities as strengths and build on them
- Commit to identifying and removing barriers for — and challenging all — students

Embrace Intentionality

- Plan and design for predictable variability in students' lived experiences, strengths, and needs

- Formulate proactive approaches, instead of reactive approaches
- Work to move responsibility for knowledge and healing from the individual to the community

Examples of practices that align with this principle include:

- Embrace learning and inclusive mindsets; accept vulnerability as without it, you miss key opportunities for growth
- Remember that service provision is a teaching and learning interaction: experience in both directions
- Hold high expectations for performance — for your students and for yourself
- Reject deficit perspectives about students' intellectual capacities or *fit* for higher education; validation and positive messaging are critical
- Tell students, "you belong;" "you can do the work;" "you can succeed;" "you have the ability;" and "you are intelligent"
- Seek opportunities to expand your own knowledge and skills in helping students with specific concerns (e.g., bias, navigating systems of oppression) as well as interfacing with equity groups
- Be open to feedback on barriers
- Learn student's names to create the feeling of *more than a number*
- Engage in continual relationship building
- Have an "open mic" session for students to ask general/informal questions
- Use external community supports (like the Youth Project) to do presentations /training for staff and students on gender identity
- Exhibit culturally inclusive active listening skills (e.g., appropriately establishing interpersonal contact, paraphrasing, perception checking, summarizing, questioning, encouraging, avoid interrupting, clarifying)
- Allow for creativity when assisting students who feel uncomfortable with current processes. When a student feels intimidated going to a formal meeting invite them to meet in the cafeteria over coffee and allow for pauses so students can formulate thoughts and have a chance to speak without feeling they are interrupting
- Establish rapport with students, groups, colleagues, and others that acknowledges differences in lived experiences
- Ensure all students feel welcome as an integral part of the institution
- Consistently update student information to ensure all populations are included in approaches
- Continue to learn about the roles of other departments to foster partnerships and create a holistic experience; visit other departments and meet the staff and find out who they are and what they do so you are able to refer students to a person that can help instead of a department name
- Demonstrate culturally inclusive advising, supporting, coaching, and counseling strategies
- Design or modify services and programs to support well-being and a positive organizational culture and ethic of care, considering students holistically

Practices to Design the Learning Environment

Be Culturally Relevant and Affirming

- Know your own cultural and social lens
- Learn about diverse cultures, lived experiences, and ways of knowing
- Connect content, assessment, and approaches/strategies to students' lived experiences and cultures

Foster A Community of Learning

- Ground decisions in accessibility and equity
- Welcome courageous conversations
- Build a learning community that goes beyond the classroom and institution

Cultivate Safe(R)/Brave Learning Environments

- Create intellectually and socially safe(r) learning environments
- Foster student voice and agency
- Establish a culture of accountability with equal space for culturally relevant conversations

Examples of practices that align with this principle include:

- Recognize the importance of students' physical, emotional, spiritual, and social well-being in learning, development, and success
- Demonstrate a willingness and capacity to generate, critically examine, and change policies and practices that privilege one group of students or educational stakeholders over another
- Communicate the learning orientation of student services/affairs to the campus community
- Understand that cultural contexts are intersectional; in addition to international students and BIPOC students, students with disabilities, Deaf, and 2SLGBTQI+ communities have their own rich, distinct, and beautiful cultures
- Acknowledge and leverage the cultural strengths and assets of your students
- *Mirror* diverse students in programming, physical spaces, course content, perspectives, and materials
- Honour the lives and backgrounds of the students you serve; this addresses students' unique cultural experiences by enhancing their growth, learning, and success, and contributes to the learning of all students
- Select inclusive resources and texts that validate the experiences of all learners as much as possible
- Create a one-stop shop where students can access entrance points for all services

- Communicate clear up-to-date office hours and modes of contact available to all students
- Invite staff from other departments for regular brainstorming sessions to discuss services offered and ways of combining, supporting and streamlining delivery to utilize resources to their maximum
- Create bridging programs to post-secondary learning
- Collaborate across departments to ensure student success
- Ensure enrollment processes are clear with a step-by-step outline or checklist that gives potential students assurance in completing all necessary components
- Utilize Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) guides to answer commonly asked questions enabling students to easily access information
- Create and communicate protocols across all departments so students can easily and accurately find the services they require
- Create culturally appropriate and welcoming spaces, this includes spaces for students to congregate, Indigenous student centres that allow smudging, etc.
- Include student feedback to inform your practice
- Flexible services delivered in multiple formats to students (in person, online, hybrid)
- Perceive and analyze unspoken dynamics in a group setting

Practices to Critically Engage Across Difference

Centre Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

- Engage in personal and professional learning and development
- Apply a social justice/decolonizing/anti-racist/anti-ableist/anti-oppressive lens to programs and environments
- Commit to designing for diverse learners

Build Authentic Relationships and Rapport

- Ground relationships in humility, trust, respect, and care
- Support students' ownership of their learning and have high expectations for all students
- Reach out to students often and engage positively

Strategize For Inclusive Information Processing, Engagement, and Assessment

- Maximize choice in expression and assessment and encourage self-reflection
- Connect your practice to the neuroscience of learning
- Advance digital equity, offer flexible delivery, and ensure access

Examples of practices that align with this principle include:

- Incorporate strategies for anti-racist, anti-ableist and decolonized education
- Facilitate student access to services by all departments being aware of what other departments do, reducing replication and allowing easier access; invite other departments to do a show and share of what their department does to ensure there is no overlap and combining best practices
- Create more student-centred services to streamline access. (e.g., MSVU students can book career counselling and accessibility appointments online)
- Facilitate educational interventions that are based upon research, trend data, and needs assessments of students
- Provide alternative models that explore student learning and development from an inclusive paradigm
- Humanize yourself by sharing your story
- Learn at least one thing about each student
- Share your pronouns with your students, if you're comfortable, and invite your students to do the same. (Avoid the term *preferred pronouns*; pronouns are not a preference, but a statement of fact.)
- Online, invite students to create short videos about themselves as a way to start building meaningful relationships; in person, find safe ways for students to meet and get to know each other
- Convey unconditional positive regard; see your students as being fully capable of succeeding; approach them in non-judgmental ways
- Set up a peer mentoring process to guide new students
- Create a system of hand-off/follow-up that allows all students to be supported throughout the process of accessing services to address any potential misunderstandings of next steps; approach the hand-off as a learning event, teaching students about self-sufficiency
- Ensure students have a person to help them navigate systems (e.g., peer support programs, advising programs, lots of different models)
- Offer support in multiple ways that best meet the individual student's need, including choice of phone calls, emails, one-on-one meetings, group meetings, text, social media, appointment, drop-ins, office, or coffee house meeting
- Ensure information is created in multiple formats
- Make your documents, presentations, and websites accessible (there are [website accessibility guidelines](#))
- Make your online meetings more accessible (see the [Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate](#)'s guide online for tips)
- Make videos accessible (e.g., use closed captions, have ASL interpreters, create transcriptions)