Tips for Inclusive Leadership in Entrepreneurship Courses

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Making a course inclusive does not require a complete overhaul. Creating an inclusive learning environment is often the sum of many small steps. One way to think about developing the skills to teach more inclusively is to think about how to lead the class more inclusively.

Inclusive leadership ensures that all members of the group feel as though they belong and that there is value in their uniqueness. The characteristics that inclusive leaders share include a commitment to diversity and inclusion, the courage (and humility) to be honest about your capabilities and knowledge, the cognizance of bias in self and in society, curiosity about others, cultural intelligence and the desire to collaborate.

Below are some questions to consider as you make incremental adaptations to make your entrepreneurship course more inclusive.

Tip 1: Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

- Are you using inclusive language (e.g. chairperson, entrepreneur, colleagues, house of worship, etc.) instead of exclusive (chairman, businessman, guys, church etc.) language in the syllabus and during lectures?
- What are you doing to be relatable to every student in your class? Do the examples and stories you share from your life/work experiences create extra distance between you and your students from other socioeconomic backgrounds? How might your stories make it harder for some students to relate to you or even approach you?
- Do you include texts and readings from underrepresented groups?
- If you have speakers, use cases or use pictures, do you include a diverse set of speakers, case protagonists, and businesses? Do the speakers and case protagonists represent the social identity of your community?
- Do you encourage students to understand the problems of people who do not look like or think like them?
- Do the exercises in your course benefit some students more than others? For example, do you expect students to use their networks or resources to complete course tasks? If so, what resources do you provide to students who may not have similar access to networks and resources? Do you require business dress for presentations?

Tip 2: Courage to be Honest

- Are you willing to be uncomfortable?
- Do you acknowledge when you need to learn another facet of diversity, whether it is about others or yourself?
- How do you acknowledge when you make a mistake?
- Do you create a safe space for students to contribute different points of view?
- Do you encourage students who have different perspectives?
- Do you advocate for students to consider all voices in group discussions or projects?

Tip 3: Cognizance of Bias

- Are you comfortable around people whose racial, ethnic, religious or sexual identity is different from yours?
- Have you considered how differences among students in regard to socioeconomic status may be impacting class participation or class discussions more broadly?

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Tip 3: Cognizance of Bias (continued)

- Are you aware of your biases? What are they? How could they affect your interactions with your students?
- Are you aware of what you don't know? There are so many ways in which we are different and we can't fully understand how all forms of diversity intersect in our classroom or in the entrepreneurial process. What do you need to learn more about?
- Are you aware of some of the places and contexts in our society that create unequal treatment of people? What are they?
- What will you do when you discover a new blind spot?
- Do your course policies as described in the syllabus/or communicated in class make it easy for students to understand your expectations? What assumptions are you making about what students already know or norms that exist in higher education that might be different for students from different backgrounds?

Tip 4: Curiosity About Others

- Do you listen without judgment?
- How do you demonstrate an open mindset?
- In what ways do you show empathy to your students?
- Do you teach empathy as part of the entrepreneurial process?
- How do you help students explore entrepreneurial opportunities from diverse perspectives?
- What steps can you take to learn more about building a more inclusive classroom?

Tip 5: Cultural Intelligence

- Are there spaces in your course where students learn the importance of appreciating different perspectives?
- Does your course encourage students to gain cultural intelligence?

Tip 6: Desire to be Collaborative

- How do you create psychological safety in the classroom?
- How does your course encourage students to pay attention to diverse ways of thinking?
- How do you balance openness and safety during class discussions?
- In what ways do you give your students the skills to be uncomfortable?
- Does your course provide students with the tools to have uncomfortable conversations or work through conflict?
- How do you help students recover and learn when they make a mistake related to DEI?

References and Recommended Readings

- Take an Implicit Bias Test (IAT)
- Bourke, J. and Espedido, A.(2019). Why Inclusive Leaders Are Good for Organizations and How to Become One. Harvard Business Review, March 29.
- Edmondson, A. (2018). How Fearless Organizations Succeed. strategy+business, Nov. 14.
- Liao, E.Y. (2015). Why You Need Cultural Intelligence (And How to Develop It). IESE Business School, March 24.