Building the Inclusive IS Classroom

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BUILDING THE INCLUSIVE INFO SYS CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

One of AIS’ three strategic goals is to cultivate community that meets the diverse needs of its members and related communities. As Information Systems (IS) educators and AIS members, we can choose to fulfill this goal in a space that we control, namely our classrooms. We can strive to build an inclusive, ethical environment for all students to flourish. This presentation will discuss the importance of inclusion and community building within the IS classroom and how it impacts student outcomes. This session will provide practical, mindful tips that faculty can use to make their IS classrooms into more inclusive spaces in order to realize AIS’ strategic goal of cultivating community.

Keywords

Inclusion, Diversity, IS pedagogy, Community, Active Learning

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The Information Systems (IS) major struggles with declining enrollments, a persistent lack of diversity, and a failure to acknowledge bias (Firth et al., 2008; Gupta et al., 2019). While we cannot affect society’s attitudes towards the major directly nor force students into a major they don’t like, we can control our classrooms. More than lecturers standing at a podium “pouring knowledge,” we can become change agents if we choose. We have an ethical responsibility to our profession and to our students to ensure that all students feel welcomed and included in our classes, and that our students embrace diverse perspectives. While information and technology are themselves tools, they are not agnostic. People decide what technology is created, how it is used to address problems, what problems it addresses, who has access and training to use it, etc. How to address the biases baked into systems (such as biased facial recognition) is a growing concern, but in the long term, we need to address the unintentional bias in our classrooms. How can IS instructors specifically and mindfully build ethical, inclusive classroom environments and encourage students to appreciate diversity in IS?

Students with “a sense of community in the classroom are more likely to attend class, to participate and to graduate” (Elliott et al., 2016, p. 29). Ideally, we want all of our students to succeed. Few instructors would admit to intentional bias against any race, gender, or creed, but humans have implicit, unconscious biases. We make assumptions about students without realizing it. We may see what we expect to see, rather than what is, also known as the Pygmalion effect (Dee & Gershenson, 2017). Luckily, the Pygmalion effect works both ways. Where possible, we can choose to give students the benefit of the doubt, we can identify and remove barriers to success (such as rising costs), and we can approach our subject matter with a growth mindset (rather than a fixed one) (Dweck, 2016). When we anchor our first impressions of students in a positive light and acknowledge that their knowledge and abilities can be developed over time, we can learn how to build inclusive classrooms. If we truly value lifelong learning, then we can accept the possibility that our rubrics may not be fair or that “how we’ve always done it” and “how we learned it” may not work for everyone all the time. We should not feel attacked when a student challenges our ways of thinking; we should consider it an exciting opportunity to learn a new way of thinking. As educators, we serve as role models for how we want students to behave as they become IS professionals, and if we don’t innovate ourselves, how will they learn how?

REFERENCES