

VU PRIDE'S TIPS & TRICKS TO AN INCLUSIVE TEACHING ENVIRONMENT (SEXUAL AND GENDER DIVERSITY)

Colofon

Authors

**Beatrice Guastella – VU Pride Volunteer, Student
Bioinformatics and Systems Biology**

**Yuli Kim – VU Pride Volunteer, Founder Inclusion
Sensei**

Boris van der Lugt – Student Assistant VU Pride

Lieneke Luit – Program Coordinator VU Pride

**Elena McDonnell – Student Ambassador VU Pride
(Medical Faculty)**

Maaïke Muntinga – Chair VU Pride

**Niek Rood – Communication & External relations
VU Pride**

**On behalf of VU Pride – The network for
LGBTQIA+ students & employees of Vrije
Universiteit Amsterdam**

Graphic design

Marina Fandakly – Student Assistant VU Pride

Publication: September 2021





VU Pride's tips & tricks for an inclusive teaching environment (sexual and gender diversity)

Dear teacher (to be),

Thank you for taking the time to read our tips & tricks for an inclusive teaching environment! We appreciate this, because there may be many students in your classroom that need your support in making the (online) classroom a safer place: approximately 5 to 7 percent¹ of your students is likely to identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and/or anything else that is not heterosexual and/or cisgender² (LGBTQIA+).

Perhaps you think that sexual and gender identity is not important in the classroom as this is purely a private matter, but actually, an inclusive learning climate is one of the keys to academic excellence³. In the UK for example, 19% percent of LGBTQIA+ students did not finish their study, compared with 11% of non-LGBTQIA+ students⁴. Also, VU Amsterdam specifically strives for 'inclusive excellence' by including diversity in education⁵.

We understand you might be terribly busy and do not have the time to submerge yourself into hundreds of pages of information on sexual & gender diversity. This is why we have summed up some key tips & tricks in this document. Would you like to know more? We would be very happy to hear from you! Just pop us an email at pride@vu.nl.

With love,

The authors

On behalf of VU Pride – the network for LGBTQIA+ students & employees of VU Amsterdam



¹ Movisie. Handreiking LHBTQI Feiten en Cijfers 2021 (<https://www.movisie.nl/sites/movisie.nl/files/2021-03/Handreiking-LHBTI-Feiten-Cijfers-2021.pdf>, accessed 9 September 2021)

² Cisgender is someone whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth. For example: somebody is born as a woman and also feels that she is a woman.

³ Roorda, Debora, Suzanne Jak, Frans Oort & Helma Koomen, "Affective relationships are associated with students' engagement and academic achievement: A Meta-Analytic Update and Test of the Mediating Role of Engagement" *School Psychology Review*. Vol. 46 Issue 3 (2017): 239-261.

⁴ LGBTQI-Inclusivity in the Higher Education Curriculum. University of Birmingham. (<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/staff/teaching-academy/documents/public/lgbt-best-practice-guide.pdf>, accessed 9 September 2021)

⁵ VU Website (<https://vu.nl/en/about-vu/more-about/diversity>, accessed 9 September 2021)



VU Pride's tips & tricks to an inclusive teaching environment (sexual and gender diversity)

1. Share your own pronouns and invite students to share theirs

A fabulous start to inclusive teaching is sharing your pronouns and inviting students to share theirs. A pronoun is a part of a sentence that is used to refer to a person or to people, such as 'she', 'they' or 'he'.

What you can do:

- When introducing yourself state your name and pronouns ('I am Abdel, I go by he/him pronouns'). We also wholeheartedly recommend this if you think everybody understands what your pronouns are (for example: if you are a woman and you are also perceived by society as a woman). This can open the door for students to be open about their gender identity and gives off the broader message that you are sensitive to issues regarding gender and sexual diversity. Also, it can be very important to prevent students from being referred to as a person of the wrong gender ('being misgendered').
- Add your pronouns on Zoom for online classes (log on to Zoom and go to your profile to edit this) and in Canvas.
- When asking students to introduce themselves, invite them to also state their name and pronouns.
- When in doubt which pronouns to use: don't assume, but ask ('you stated you use she/her and they/them pronouns, which one would you like me to use?').

2. Setting an example: including LGBTQIA+ examples and role models

In every classroom setting, teachers use clarifying examples and cases. Very often these examples feature or are based on white, cisgender, heterosexual people. For LGBTQIA+ students, representation can be an important factor to feel at home in the classroom.

What you can do:

- Include LGBTQIA+ examples and/or issues on sexual or gender identity⁶ in your lectures and in your written materials. Please note: there are opportunities to do so in almost every academic field. For example;
 - When you are a Methodology teacher and you discuss data collection, you can invite students to include more categories than 'male' or 'female' when gathering data. Other relevant options include 'intersex', 'non binary', 'gender fluid' and 'other'.
 - When teaching Business and Economics include an example of a company targeting LGBTQIA+ customers⁷.
 - On the rare occasion that there are no examples with LGBTQIA+ topics you could explain why or ask your students this question. For instance, in History written sources may be biased towards sources from and about heteronormative people but that does not mean that LGBTQIA+ people did not exist!

⁶ Gender identity is a person's sense of their gender, whether male, female or something else, which may or may not match the sex assigned at birth.

⁷ 'Toolbox Inclusief hoger onderwijs met betrekking tot seksuele en genderdiversiteit' Student Pride <https://www.scienceguide.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Toolbox-definitief-22-05-2021.pdf>, accessed 9 September 2021).



- Be especially mindful to also mention LGBTQIA+ topics when teaching about sexuality and relationships.
- Make sure that the LGBTQIA+ people in your examples are not stigmatizing. For example, when you are part of the medical sciences department, please make sure that not every gay person you mention is living with HIV/AIDS. Because not everybody who is gay is living with HIV/AIDS and not everybody who is living with HIV/AIDS is gay.

3. Words matter – choose them wisely!

‘Dear ladies and gentlemen’ or ‘can everybody write down his or her name’ can seem like perfectly valid forms of communication, but it does not do justice to the group of students that does not identify as male or female (for example, non-binary students do not identify as ‘a man’ or ‘a woman’). Using inclusive wording can make a big difference for many of your students.

What you can do:

- Address people with their function, for example ‘dear students’ instead of ‘dear ladies and gentlemen’ or the ‘parents’ instead of the ‘mother and father’
- When referring to members of the LGBTQIA+ community please always use ‘People-first language’. ‘Transgender’, ‘bisexual’ and the other terms are adjectives, not nouns! Please talk about ‘a transgender/bisexual/etc. person’ and not about ‘a transgender’ or ‘a bisexual’
- Instead of ‘he or she’ and ‘his or her’ please use ‘they’ or ‘their’ if gender is irrelevant. It is also good practice (and grammatically correct) to use ‘they/them’ when referring to a person whose gender you don’t know.
- Try not to make assumptions about someone’s gender or sexual identity and lifestyle, try to use gender neutral words such as ‘partner(s)’, instead of assuming that a female student’s partner is male and vice versa.

4. Include LGBTQIA+ inclusive literature

Striving for a wide range of diversity in the mandatory literature in your course is a very helpful way of including diversity in a course.

What you can do:

- Include literature from LGBTQIA+ authors. For example, in mathematics, you could include information on the life and work of Alan Turing. When teaching history, you could include a textual source from an LGBTQIA+ person. In economics, you could include work on the socioeconomic position of LGBTQIA+ people, such as the COST project (a research project on this topic in which VU Amsterdam participates)
- Include literature about sexual and gender diversity. This can be very relevant in psychology, sociology and biology, to name a few areas.

5. How can you be an ally?

Even if you do not belong to the LGBTQIA+ community yourself, you can still be a great ally who supports our community. There are many things you can do to be an ally, below we give a few examples, but there are many more options of course!

What you can do:



- Many LGBTQIA+ people have personal experiences with stigmatization and discrimination: this can range from ‘jokes’ being made about (their) sexual or gender identity to outright homo/bi/transphobic remarks. If such remarks or ‘jokes’ are made in the classroom it can make a big difference if a teacher steps in and addresses the issue. There are many ways in which you can do this, ranging from speaking up about a topic, saying you do not accept these comments in your classroom, to opening a discussion about LGBTQIA+ discrimination. Choose what you feel comfortable with! But please do mark the moment: your silence might otherwise be interpreted as approval.
- Show your support for the community by, for example, paying attention to important days for the community (such as Coming Out Day, the 11th of October), or by letting your students know they can reach out to you if they are experiencing difficulties. Inform yourself where you can refer your students to if they are having difficulties, such as [the team ‘Social Wellbeing’](#) or [VU Pride](#).

6. Respect your student’s privacy

If a student shares information about their gender identity or sexual orientation with you, it is not necessarily something they want (you) to share with all other students.

What you can do:

- Do not share information about your students’ sexual orientation or gender identity with anybody else, unless they have given you their explicit consent.

7. Inform yourself on LGBTQIA+ topics

Familiarizing yourself with information on sexual and gender diversity can be very helpful. There are many sources available, below are a few:

- LGBTQI-Inclusivity in the Higher Education Curriculum. University of Birmingham. Click [here](#).
- Delivering LGBT-inclusive Higher Education. Academic provision, accommodation, catering, facilities, induction, recruitment, registry, societies, sports and student services. Stonewall. Click [here](#).
- Regenboogschrijfwijzer. Gemeente Amsterdam. Click [here](#) (in Dutch).
- Toolbox Inclusief hoger onderwijs met betrekking tot seksuele en genderdiversiteit. Student Pride. Click [here](#) (in Dutch).

Of course, you can always contact VU Pride if you are looking for more information: pride@vu.nl. Also please contact VU Pride’s student ambassadors: vuprideambassadors@gmail.com.

VU Pride’s student ambassadors:

- Gabriëlla van Bruggen (Faculty of Law (Criminology and law))
- Isabella Farhat (Faculty of Humanities (Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology))
- Elena McDonnell (Faculty of Medicine)
- Melanie Rietveld (Faculty of Science/Humanities (Biomedical science and philosophy))
- Ayla Usakligil (Faculties of Dentistry (ACTA))