Why Do We Need to Promote Diversity in the Learning Environment?

This resource provides a definition of diversity and explores the rationale for advocating for diversity within educational settings. It serves as a guide to better understand the advantages of intentionally integrating diversity, in terms of representation, perspectives, and experiences into the learning environment.

What is Diversity?

Our student body is becoming increasingly diverse in multiple ways. The Penn State Data Digest which serves as a tool that allows users to learn more about our student population, refers to aspects of identity s race/ethnicity, sex, and age group. However, many more aspects of social and personal identity as well as personal attributes and experiences contribute to diversity, e.g., sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability, income level, first-generation status, veteran status, or cultural heritage.

What are the Benefits of Incorporating Diversity into the Learning Environment?

1. Diverse representation promotes perception of self-esteem and resilience

Research suggests that learning environments in which students can explore diverse cultures increase students' perception of self-esteem and resilience, which in turn might contribute to their academic and social achievements (Akin & Radford, 2018).

2. Students perform better in diverse environments

Students who are in environments in which they can interact with diverse student populations in terms of socioeconomic background, race, and ethnicity, students show higher academic achievements (Figlio et al., 2023).

3. Students can learn from different cultural experiences

Students in diverse groups can learn from each other by sharing their cultural knowledge and experiences and connecting these to academic knowledge (Gay, 2010). Making connections across various cultural experiences and knowledge leads to a more meaningful learning experience.

4. Honoring students' diverse identities creates inclusive learning environments

Social identities can affect students' experiences in our courses. Honoring identities means creating an **inclusive (link) learning environment**, supporting **belonging (link)** through building community and addressing negative comments/behaviors (e.g., microaggressions). Instructors should be aware of how their own identities might impact their beliefs and values and should also explore their own biases to reduce the potential of harming students in our learning environments.