

FIW Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policies for Syllabi

May 10, 2022

The FIW DEI committee recommended the following as important components of the syllabus and items to discuss on the first day of class to illustrate the instructor's commitment to these concepts and overall commitment to diversity and inclusion in the department. Faculty in the department supported these recommendations and agreed these components should be included in their syllabi going forward.

A. Use gender neutral language like “the student”

B. Include pronouns next to instructor and TA's names at top of syllabus

C. University Required Syllabus Content: (Note these are updated on a regular basis. Look for emails from Assoc. Dean Keith Goyne at the start of the semester for the latest language).

1. Disabilities statement

Virginia Tech welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. The University promotes efforts to provide equal access and a culture of inclusion without altering the essential elements of coursework. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers that may be due to disability, including but not limited to ADHD, chronic or temporary medical conditions, deaf or hard of hearing, learning disability, mental health, or vision impairment, please contact the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office (540-231-3788, ssd@vt.edu, or visit www.ssd.vt.edu). If you have an SSD accommodation letter, please meet with me privately during office hours as early in the semester as possible to deliver your letter and discuss your accommodations. You also must give me reasonable notice to implement your accommodations, which is generally 5 business days and 10 business days for final exams.

Additional resources:

Syllabus Tips and Sampling Statements:

<https://teaching.vt.edu/teachingresources/syllabi-and-learning-contracts/example-syllabus-statements.html>

D. FWC DEI Committee Recommended and faculty approved:

1. Principles of community

i. Official text:

Virginia Tech is a public land-grant university, committed to teaching and learning, research, and outreach to the Commonwealth of Virginia, the nation, and the world community. Learning from the experiences that shape Virginia Tech as an institution, we acknowledge those aspects of our legacy that reflected bias and exclusion. Therefore, we adopt and practice the following principles as fundamental to our on-going efforts to increase

access and inclusion and to create a community that nurtures learning and growth for all of its members:

- We affirm the inherent dignity and value of every person and strive to maintain a climate for work and learning based on mutual respect and understanding.
- We affirm the right of each person to express thoughts and opinions freely. We encourage open expression within a climate of civility, sensitivity, and mutual respect.
- We affirm the value of human diversity because it enriches our lives and the University. We acknowledge and respect our differences while affirming our common humanity.
- We reject all forms of prejudice and discrimination, including those based on age, color, disability, gender, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, and veteran status. We take individual and collective responsibility for helping to eliminate bias and discrimination and for increasing our own understanding of these issues through education, training, and interaction with others.
- We pledge our collective commitment to these principles in the spirit of the Virginia Tech motto of *Ut Prosim* (That I may Serve).

Additional resources:

Principles of Community: <https://www.inclusive.vt.edu/Programs/vtpoc0.html>

Undergraduate discussion guide:

https://www.inclusive.vt.edu/content/dam/inclusive_vt_edu/initiatives/DiversityEduDiscussionGuide.pdf

ii. Example of how an instructor personalized it for their course:

Classroom conduct and expectations: We affirm Virginia Tech's [Principles of Community](#) to increase access and inclusion and strive to promote an environment that nurtures learning and growth for all. To accomplish this, we highlight the following standards:

- **Share responsibility for including all voices in the conversation.** If you tend to speak frequently, strive to leave sufficient space to hear from others. If you often stay quiet in discussions, challenge yourself to contribute so others can learn from you. No questions are “silly” or “too basic.” If you are having trouble following a subject, chances are someone else is, too. Please ask questions.
§ **Listen respectfully.** Do not interrupt, engage in private conversations, or turn to technology while others are speaking. Use attentive, courteous body language. We utilize technology extensively during this course but expect its use to be limited to classroom purposes, only.
- **Understand that there are different approaches to solving problems.** If you are uncertain about an approach, ask questions to explore areas of uncertainty. Listen respectfully to how and why the approach could work.
- **There is a wide range in students' comfort and previous experience with quantitative ecology.** Some may have substantial prior statistical and coding experience, while others may have little. We are committed to mutual support to ensure that all students, regardless of background, achieve the learning objectives. If you feel like you need additional help, please ask us!

- If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or exclude you, please let us know as soon as possible. Together we will develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course, including accommodations as might be necessary.
- If we suspect you need additional support, we will express our concerns and highlight helpful resources. It is not our intent to know personal details, but rather to express concern and point out that help, if needed, is available.

2. Religious holidays statement

In accordance with the university policy for religious and ethnic holidays, we are willing to make accommodations for reasonable requests (see https://www.registrar.vt.edu/dates_deadlines/religious_ethnic/). If you need an accommodation due to a religious or ethnic holiday, please let the instructor know within two weeks of the start of the course (by insert date).

3. Mental health statement

Supporting the mental health and well-being of students in my class is a high priority to me. As a student, you may at some time experience a challenge that can interfere with learning, such as strained relationships, loss of a loved one, anxiety, substance abuse, feeling down, or difficulty concentrating. These mental health concerns or stressful events may diminish your academic performance and/or reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. Services are available to support you or a friend you might be worried about. Please reach out to any of the following offices:

Cook Counseling:

- 540-231-6557 to schedule an appointment and/or 24/7 crisis support
- ucc.vt.edu for more information

Dean of Students Office:

- 540 231-3787 for general advice, including but not limited to challenges securing food or housing
- 540-231-6411 for after-hours crisis
- dos.vt.edu for more information

Hokie Wellness:

- hokiewellness.vt.edu for more information about health and wellness workshops and consultations.

Additional resource:

- Training on mental health first aid:
<https://hokiewellness.vt.edu/Employees/programs/mhfa.html>

4. Statement on honoring names and pronouns

We will honor your request to address you by your chosen name or personal pronoun. Please advise us early in the semester so that we may make appropriate changes to our records.

Additional resource:

- Norms of inclusion:
https://www.inclusive.vt.edu/content/dam/inclusive_vt_edu/docs/NormOfInclusion.pdf

5. Basic needs statement

For any student who has difficulty affording groceries, accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and if you believe this may affect your performance in this course, you are urged to contact the Dean of Students office for support at 540-231-3787 or complete an [interest form](#) to participate in The Market at Virginia Tech. The Dean of Students, through The Market at Virginia Tech, offers food options and other resources. There is also a [Student Emergency Fund program](#). If you are comfortable in doing so, please notify your professor or departmental advisor of your situation. This will enable them to provide any resources they have access to.

Additional resources:

- Future Economy Collective: <https://sustainableblacksburgva.org/2021/03/12/future-economy-collective-southpaw-cafe/>
The best way to check on the status of the fridge is through their facebook page, because the food goes fast once it's stocked. <https://www.facebook.com/NRV-Community-Fridge-106742275038723>
- If faculty want to support the FEC on a regular basis, they can sign up on the patreon here, <https://www.patreon.com/fec>

6. Land and Labor Acknowledgment

Statement provided by the [American Indian & Indigenous Community Center](#):

Virginia Tech acknowledges that we live and work on the Tutelo / Monacan People's homeland and we recognize their continued relationships with their lands and waterways. We further acknowledge that legislation and practices like the Morrill Act (1862) enabled the commonwealth of Virginia to finance and found Virginia Tech through the forced removal of Native Nations from their lands, both locally and in western territories.

We understand that honoring Native Peoples without explicit material commitments falls short of our institutional responsibilities. Through sustained, transparent, and meaningful engagement with the Tutelo / Monacan Peoples, and other Native Nations, we commit to changing the trajectory of Virginia Tech's history by increasing Indigenous student, staff, and faculty recruitment and retention, diversifying course offerings, and meeting the growing needs of all Virginia tribes and supporting their sovereignty.

We must also recognize that enslaved Black people generated revenue and resources used to establish Virginia Tech and were prohibited from attending until 1953. Through InclusiveVT, the institutional and individual commitment to Ut Prosim (that I may serve) in the spirit of community, diversity, and excellence, we commit to advancing a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive community.

Additional resources: faculty may find information from the APLU and Pulitzer Center, which explain how land grant universities were secured.

- **APLU:** <https://www.aplu.org/about-us/land-acknowledgment.html>
- **Pulitzer Center:** <https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/how-they-did-it-exposing-how-us-universities-profited-indigenous-land>