

## The Inclusive Learning Environments Initiative

(Revised May 10, 2016)

### *About the Initiative*

The Inclusive Learning Environments Initiative is the result of the Senate Student Relations Committee’s yearlong conversation about how DU faculty can take a leading role in responding proactively and productively to one of the most significant questions facing our campus and American higher education today: How do we foster a truly inclusive educational experience, one wherein all students feel equally welcome and empowered to learn?

That this is a crucial question for American higher education generally and for DU specifically is amply demonstrated by recent events: Across the country, university students from historically marginalized communities have been voicing a powerful call for transformative institutional change. That call can be heard here at DU, too, as the recent campus climate report and public testimony from DU students readily attest. By adopting the Initiative, the Senate seeks to insure that faculty take a leadership role in responding to this historic call for change.

Indeed, the Senate believes that DU’s response to this call *must* be led, first and foremost, by faculty. In our classrooms, in our labs, in our studios, in the field, and elsewhere, it is we, the University faculty, who create the environments wherein student learning takes place; it therefore we who are best positioned to lead the way in making positive change.

To that end, the Senate has invited collaboration from the offices of Diversity and Inclusion, Teaching and Learning, Campus Life and Inclusive Excellence, and Undergraduate Programs to develop an infrastructure to provide participating faculty with the resources we need to develop and realize our vision of an inclusive learning environment. Realizing that vision is central to the University’s future. *DU IMPACT 2025*, the University’s strategic plan, “outlines a vision of a modern urban global university dedicated to the public good—an institution that cultivates an *inclusive community* [emphasis added] to prepare students to lead lives of impact and benefits Denver and society through its research, teaching and service” (p. viii). To cultivate an inclusive community, the plan promises students “a deep and meaningful engagement with diversity,” in which they “will have the opportunity to engage in meaningful experiences that cultivate an understanding and appreciation for the range of diverse individuals and perspectives that exists on our campus, in our nation’s communities and around the world” (p. viii). The Inclusive Learning Environments Initiative enables us to powerfully affirm — to our students, our colleagues, and the broader community — the faculty’s commitment to fulfilling that promise.

### *Statement of Commitment from University of Denver Faculty Senate*

The University of Denver Faculty Senate is committed to helping faculty across campus to create inclusive learning environments in all the spaces in which they teach and to helping to create a more inclusive campus overall. To these ends, the Senate encourages faculty to help students to understand the ethical and social contexts in which their learning takes place; to reflect in their annual reviews upon their efforts to create a more inclusive learning environment in their courses; to include in their syllabi a statement on inclusivity;<sup>1</sup> to support their unit’s efforts to assess inclusivity; and to engage, during the next two academic years, in one or more of the faculty development

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<sup>1</sup> Here is an example of such a statement:

In this class, we will work together to develop a learning community that is inclusive and respectful. Our diversity may be reflected by differences in race, culture, age, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, and myriad other social identities and life experiences. The goal of inclusiveness, in a diverse community, encourages and appreciates expressions of different ideas, opinions, and beliefs, so that conversations and interactions that could potentially be divisive turn instead into opportunities for intellectual and personal enrichment.

A dedication to inclusiveness requires respecting what others say, their right to say it, and the thoughtful consideration of others' communication. Both speaking up *and* listening are valuable tools for furthering thoughtful, enlightening dialogue. Respecting one another's individual differences is critical in transforming a collection of diverse individuals into an inclusive, collaborative and excellent learning community. Our core commitment shapes our core expectation for behavior inside and outside of the classroom.

opportunities listed below. The Senate also charges the Student Relations Committee with inviting student leaders and interested faculty to an annual Conversation about Inclusive Learning Environments during the winter term and to reporting on that conversation at a Senate meeting in the spring.

#### INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS INITIATIVE FACULTY DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES<sup>2</sup>

1. Take part in an **Inclusivity Institute**, sponsored by the Office of Diversity & Inclusion, on designing and teaching inclusive courses.
2. Take part in at least two of the workshops in the yearlong **Inclusive Pedagogies Practicum** offered by the Office of Diversity & Inclusion.
3. Take part in one of the **Inclusivity and Universal Design** offerings sponsored by the Office of Teaching and Learning.
4. **Partner with a faculty colleague** to visit one another's classrooms and provide feedback.
5. Teach a **community-based/service-learning** class that foregrounds issues of diversity and inclusivity in the wider world.
6. Dedicate at least one class period to a **lecture or activity** showing the value of inclusivity to learning and scholarship, particularly in my field.
7. Dedicate at least one class period to hosting a course-appropriate **guest practitioner/speaker** to discuss the work that he or she has done around issues of inclusivity in their field.
8. Participate in a **conference** on inclusivity in higher education.
9. Undertake and share the results of a **research project** on inclusivity on campus.
10. Present on inclusive pedagogy at the **Diversity Summit** or other appropriate campus forum.
11. Organize a **student-centered event** related to inclusivity (e.g., a public lecture or discussion or an exhibition of student work).

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<sup>2</sup> The opportunities listed here are under development. The Senate Student Relations Committee is collaborating with our partners in administration to create the most diverse and useful menu of opportunities that we can. Specific details regarding dates, topics, financial and other support, etc. are forthcoming.