



Diversity and Inclusion within teaching practices | GEC&P programme

Introduction

The Global Environmental Change and Policy (GEC&P) programme is a specialization within the 2-year Earth Sciences Masters of Vrije Universiteit (VU). This Masters focuses on the natural processes and cycles of the Earth's system within and between rock, soil, water, living things, and air. This is done by quantifying the magnitude and rate of these processes in both space and in time, as well as looking at the influence of humanity on the Earth's Systems.

More specifically, the GEC&P specialization focuses on creating sustainable solutions to challenges caused by major changes in the Earth's geological and ecological systems through sound interdisciplinary research. This specialization addresses topics, for example, the unprecedented impacts of human activities on the Earth's systems as well as understanding the Earth System by the broader social, political, and economic aspects of global environmental change. In order to explore integrated approaches to solving global sustainability challenges, topics such as Earth Sciences, Environmental Economics, and Environmental Policy and Governance, interdisciplinary research, and fieldwork are part of the specialization.

Within education, diversity and inclusion are topics widely discussed. But when we think about diversity and inclusion, what comes to our minds? And why are they important within education? Diversity and inclusion can be related to different cultures, backgrounds, and lines of thought, but also themes, approaches, formats, etc. In December 2022, students and teachers from the GEC&P programme of the VU started a project aiming to improve diversity in the programme in terms of themes, approaches, material, and staff making sure it is a safe environment for staff and students.

This document is one of the outputs of the Diversity and Inclusion GEC&P project team in which it provides tips and tricks on how to incorporate diversity and inclusion within the teaching practices.



Tips and Tricks

Below tips and tricks on how to incorporate diversity and inclusion within teaching practices are provided (see flowchart on how they are organized).

For further information, you can contact us via: ana.cassanti@vu.nl (*e-mail from the project team to be changed in the future and will be updated*).

This is a **working document** and will be updated throughout the project. For more material, such as templates, literature, etc., please visit our One Drive folder*.



Core Themes

- Q&As: make use of Q&A/feedback moments not only for solving students' questions as well as to ask for feedback on how the course is going.
- Office Hours: try to implement office hours during the course (e.g. aware of the workload of the teachers we propose a few possibilities in order not to increase them, such as asking for the support of Judos or having one office hour halfway through the course).
- Evaluation Surveys: understanding how the course is going can bring benefits to both teachers and students, in order to do that, a survey halfway through the course (e.g. via Mentimeter, Google forms) in which it is asked the opinion of the students on elements of the course (e.g. literature, lectures, assessments), can help on improving the course.
- Definition List: in case of doubts about terminologies to use (e.g. Global North and Global South) have a look at our definitions list (*in process*).
- Mindful Positionality: think about how our own positionality affects how the course is designed (e.g. what case studies are selected, how students are engaged in the classroom, etc.). By being aware of that, it is possible to use some of the strategies below on adding more diversity/inclusion to it if needed/wanted.

*One folder link:

https://vunl-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/ana_cassanti_vu_nl/EnAzrNi0ok1KvelSQaAOuaEBqQoNseTS7y4TyGZGdPJAgg?e=SYZqat

Curriculum

- Readings: diversify sources of readings or critically discuss them in the context of the course topic (e.g. Google forms to gather students' perspectives or open discussions).
- Intersectional Perspectives: encourage topics from different regions and perspectives (e.g. inviting guest speakers from minorities; providing examples keeping in mind the broader context).
- Climate & Environmental Justice: more specifically related to environmental studies, a good example of a broader topic to be approached within courses is climate and environmental justice in the views of the course given.
- Comparative Case Studies: diversify sources of case studies (not only topic and region but keep in mind the message that the comparative cases can bring; e.g. if always Germany and Norway are taken as examples of green energy while China and India are taken as the main polluters, what is the background message we may convey to a diverse audience?).

Classroom inclusivity

- Introduction Exercises: reduce anonymity in the classroom between students and students and teachers, by doing so, everyone may feel more comfortable sharing their perspectives and asking questions (e.g. utilizing an introduction exercise in which they have to introduce themselves to peers by using an object as well as the teacher).
- Ground Rules: establish ground rules for interaction and discussion together with the class (e.g. what constitutes 'active participation', how do you voice disagreement/your opinion, how do you respond if someone voices disagreement/their opinion, etc. – using Mentimeter, Canvas Discussion Board).
- Start with a Survey: in order to ensure a safe learning environment, it is important to know how students/teachers may prefer to be addressed (e.g. topics that could be asked: preferred name, pronouns, name pronunciation, contact preferences, accessibility needs, etc.).
- Acknowledge Multiple Views: it is important that among students and teachers and students it is acknowledged that multiple views may exist. For that, the ground rules can be very useful to set the tone on how different perspectives can be approached and how important this is for the learning process.
- Student Sharing: ask students to share the values and competencies they bring to the group. This helps with creating a shared identity in the group and understanding that their differences are important for the learning process (e.g. ice breaker exercises in which they need to list similarities and differences).

Teaching approaches

- Time for Discussion: try to delineate time for discussion in the classroom (e.g. make space for it in your lesson plan and leave space for organic conversation; follow up on students' questions during discussion moments).

- Working Groups: if possible make use of smaller working groups within the course (by doing so, it is possible to have closer interaction with students in which is easier to ask for informal feedback, etc.).
- Seating: the impact of physical space is important for the learning outcomes (e.g. sitting in a “circle” altogether improves physical inclusivity in the classroom, such as feeling more involved, welcomed, and more likely to engage with the peers and the teacher).
- Guest Speakers: if the topic/discussion within the lecture approaches a specific country, and a guest speaker will be considered for the lecture, try to invite a speaker from that country (if not possible, consider discussing the perspectives of the guest speaker from his/her position and/or location he/she may work).
- Student Perspectives: acknowledge that multiple views exist and are present in the classroom (e.g. implement activities from the Mixed Classroom booklet to help your students feel safe and supported in raising those views in discussion moments or to ask questions in case of doubts).

Assessments

- Flexibility within assessments: extensions of assignments usually need to be agreed upon within the examination board, however, in some individual circumstances the course coordinator may want to grant them based (e.g. having a section on Canvas in which the teacher points out potential situations – health issues (physical or mental), family issues, etc. – that he/she will consider extensions by him/herself and which ones need to be sent to the examination board).
- Discussions as alternative assessment: another possible type of assessment is to make use of classroom discussion moments (e.g. divide the students into sub-groups and give them a stakeholder role and a case study and they need to prepare by using literature and theories from the course to ‘defend’ their position).
- Reflection on exams: add potential spaces in the exam for the reflection on the topics asked at it (e.g. add an extra/bonus question by the end of the exam asking if there is any topic/theory that was not approached within the exam and if the student would like to elaborate on it based on theories/literature).
- Critical reflection exercises: critical reflections can be used as an assessment during exams (as mentioned above), or as extra assignments (e.g. discussion board in Canvas, Google Forms) in which students need to critically evaluate a theory or literature (e.g. give a case study and ask students to elaborate on how to solve it using two different perspectives/theories approached during the course).



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