Dave Kung, a professor of mathematics at St. Mary's College of Maryland, was the keynote speaker during the October session of the Dialogue in Action series. Dialogue in Action is an interactive series, sponsored by the President's Council on Diversity and University Life Council Senate, which features monthlong presentations with topics focusing on achieving inclusion in the classroom. After each monthly presentation, small group sessions are held the remainder of the month to allow participants the opportunity for in-depth discussion and dialogue. After Kung’s presentation, the small groups had the same questions - how do I define equal versus fairness and how do I implement fairness and quality in a large classroom?

Because one of the goals of Dialogue in Action is to provide faculty with strategies they can use, Kung was asked to answer these questions. His answers are below.
IE Tips and Strategies

The Cornell University Center for Teaching Excellence suggests that inclusive teaching strategies, “contribute to an overall inclusive learning environment, in which students feel equally valued.” Below are some recommended pedagogical strategies:

**Why use inclusive teaching strategies?**

“Even though some of us might wish to conceptualize our classrooms as culturally neutral or might choose to ignore the cultural dimensions, students cannot check their sociocultural identities at the door, nor can they instantly transcend their current level of development... Therefore, it is important that the pedagogical strategies we employ in the classroom reflect an understanding of social identity development so that we can anticipate the tensions that might occur in the classroom and be proactive about them” (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 169-170).

**How can you teach inclusively?**

- Be reflective by asking yourself the following:
  - How might your own cultural-bound assumptions influence your interactions with students?
  - How might the backgrounds and experiences of your students influence their motivation, engagement, and learning in your classroom?
- How can you modify course materials, activities, assignments, and/or exams to be more accessible to all students in your class?
- Incorporate diversity into your overall curriculum.
- Be intentional about creating a safe learning environment by using ground rules.
- Be proactive in connecting with and learning about your students.
- Use a variety of teaching strategies, activities, and assignments that will accommodate the needs of students with diverse learning styles, abilities, backgrounds, and experiences.
- Use universal design principles to create accessible classes. For example, present information both orally and visually to accommodate both students with visual or auditory impairments in addition to students with various learning preferences.
- When possible, provide flexibility in how students demonstrate their knowledge and how you assess student knowledge and development.

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**Getting Started and Setting the Tone**

So how do I get started on the right foot? Many of the things that make students from diverse backgrounds comfortable are the things that will encourage student participation.

Below are some ways to create an engaging classroom environment:

- On Day One talk about the class as a community, and say that you expect everyone to feel comfortable participating in discussions. Include this information on your syllabus.
- On Day One, explain that you value student input and engagement, and note that this requires ground rules. Allow small student groups to develop ground rules and then allow the class to refine those rules. Once they are developed, post the final results on your Blackboard site, in your office, and anywhere students will see them. Students want a respectful learning environment, and you’ll be surprised that they often make stricter rules than you do!
- Include small group activities, such as “think/pair/share” or small group problem-solving in your class to give students a chance to vet their ideas before being asked to offer them in a larger class discussion. Make sure to model this kind of activity on Day One, so students learn your expectations.
- Create opportunities for students to share their thoughts in class, even in large classes.
- If you have TAs, assign each to a sub-section of the class, and ask the TAs to send students regular emails, checking in with students about their classroom experience and offering assistance and guidance as appropriate.
- Be accessible to students—when students cannot attend office hours due to conflicting obligations, offer to make appointments. Show that you care about their learning by responding to student inquiries and needs.
- Consider doing a mid-term survey, and when you get the results, report them back to the students. Discuss what changes you can or cannot make in response to their feedback and implement the changes you can make.

UAlbany has many campus resources to assist you with engaging students and creating a positive learning environment. They include:

- The Office of Diversity & Inclusion: 956-8110, www.albany.edu/diversityandinclusion/
- The Institute for Teaching, Learning and Academic Leadership (ITLAL): www.itlal.org/
- Undergraduate Education: 442 3950, www.albany.edu/undergraduateeducation/
The University of Albany kicked off its Inclusive Excellence efforts, UACCESS, last fall and already many of the campus departments and offices are implementing various strategies and efforts to ensure that the campus is more diverse and inclusive. The Division of Student Success and the Department of Biology outline some of the IE efforts.

**DIVISION OF STUDENT SUCCESS**

The Division of Student Success Mission Statement says we will “foster respect for the diversity of our community as well as for the individuality of each student and ensure that all students are extended a full and equal place in our community.” This statement is included on the divisional website, in various publications, and our staff works to impart this message to students so that they have a better understanding of why we value diversity and inclusion. As part of their orientation, new students engage in a conversation about diversity and inclusion and how embracing a culture of inclusion will enrich their overall UA experience and serve them well as they embark on their careers.

Taking steps to increase multicultural skills is essential and Student Success is committed to providing ongoing training for the UAlbany community. We provide opportunities to attend coalition building workshops (NCBI) and Safe Space Training which provides an affirming and inclusive environment for LGBT students, faculty and staff. We have also ensured that our staff has been involved in UACCESS programs, trainings and activities.

We have worked to ensure that the Student Success office environment and our web site illustrate our values and our support of diversity. As well, the development of a multicultural, gender and sexuality and women’s resource centers and the CHARGE multicultural program are a means to provide a supportive environment to foster respect and appreciation for differences in culture, race, ethnicity, religion, language, national origin, sexual orientation, gender and other dimensions of identity. These are also places to provide an educational forum to discuss these issues and their impact on individuals and groups.

Student Success is also committed to supporting a culture of assessment to better understand the effectiveness of programs and services so as to be accountable to the students we serve. Our assessments allow us to evaluate how students from various backgrounds use our campus resources and gain information about student attitudes and experiences to better address their needs.

*Submitted by The Division of Student Success*

**DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES**

Inspired by UACCESS, the Department of Biological Sciences is moving forward with a plan to diversify and create a more inclusive environment.

Faculty representatives are developing and renewing connections with faculty at minority-serving institutions and we will visit these schools to share information about departmental research and academic programs. Our new partners in inclusive excellence will also be invited to visit our department to similarly promote their programs. We hope to build upon these relationships and develop new contacts so that prospective graduate students and faculty candidates from these institutions will look to UAlbany when making decisions about their careers.

Additionally, biology faculty attending scientific society meetings will engage members of minority subgroups within these organizations to share our programmatic information and to develop a network of contacts across the biological sciences. Finally, we will participate in meetings sponsored by organizations that promote graduate education for underrepresented students and faculty diversity, for example, the Compact for Faculty Diversity.

These are initial steps and we are optimistic that they will result in long-term changes and that the department and university will become more diverse.

*Submitted by the Department of Biological Sciences*
UA Launches Faculty and Staff Dialogues

While there is no magic formula for achieving Inclusive Excellence, work done by the President’s Council on Diversity revealed that the campus climate needs attention. The Council, which has a large membership with varied voices from across the campus, addressed this concern by developing "Dialogue in Action" for faculty and "Action Steps Toward Inclusive Excellence," for staff. Both programs have been instituted to help cultivate an environment conducive to learning and success for the entire campus community.

“Dialogues,” said Michael Jaromin, University Life Council Senate Chair, which co-sponsors “Dialogue in Action,” “are highly effective in bridging differences based on ethnic, racial or cultural background, socio-economic status, age, gender, sexual orientation, etc. Person-to-person exchanges also foster respect for one another and encourages more mutual understanding.”

As well, dialogues, especially those with trained facilitators, are well-suited for fostering thoughtful discussion of complex, sometimes contentious issues or topics within group settings. The facilitated sessions take the fear out of talking openly about sensitive issues, encourages participants to speak honestly about their own views and to listen deeply to other’s knowledge, perspectives and experiences. At the same time, the act of listening respectfully to the views of others deepens participants’ understanding of perspectives other than their own.

The Dialogues groups’ diversity along so many dimensions, including career stage and discipline, has produced fascinating food for thought, says Professor Karyn Loscoceco, Dialogue in Action co-facilitator.

“It has been helpful to hear how and what faculty are thinking about diversity and inclusion as we move toward practical solutions,” Loscoceco said. “Faculty seem to be enjoying the chance to share ideas and information, and to consider big questions. It’s been useful for all of us to know that there are many faculty concerned about teaching and the push to do so effectively. A sense of community is beginning to develop, which is gratifying.”

“Dialogue in Action is an ongoing process,” says Professor Walter Little, “Dialogue in Action” co-chair. “The dialogues are not a forum for us to consider how to be fair teachers, but for us to strive to better understand how our quite diverse body of students experience large and small classes differently.”

While “Action Steps Toward Inclusive Excellence” is in the developing stages, “Dialogue in Action” is in progress. Please participate as your schedule permits.

Calendar Reminder

The March/April Dialogue in Action sessions will feature discussions on dynamics in a diverse classroom and building inclusive classrooms for LGBTQ students. Strategies and tips for success from those sessions will be shared in future issues of IE Trends.
provide story ideas, contact The Office of Diversity & Inclusion at:

Answer: Equality is everyone being treated exactly the same. In theory that's a wonderful concept. In the messy world in which we actually live, populated by people who see each other differently - and even see themselves differently depending on their surroundings - treating everyone the same does not mean we are giving everyone the same opportunity to learn and thrive. The first-generation student who knows little of how a campus works will excel if given the right support. And the kind of support needed depends on the experiences the student brings to the classroom.

Unlike equality, fairness in the academic setting defies an easy definition. To me, it's the unattainable goal of providing every student with the resources they need so they will succeed. This does not mean that they don't work hard. Much like the "more perfect nation" laid out in our founding documents; I am continually working to make my classroom a fairer place, trying to put each student into positions where they will be supported and move forward with their education.

The first step toward creating a classroom where students are treated equally is to understand the forces that create divergent opportunities to learn within my classroom. A first-generation student may not know to come to my office hours. As a result, I can encourage all students to do so or specifically request that she come. Even better, I could coerce all students to stop by my office (by handing out an assignment during office hours) but spend a little extra time engaging her when she comes, with the goal of having her return regularly. Or a lone African-American student may be largely shut out of his group's work by his white peers. By approaching the table where they are sitting from behind the African-American student, I can shift the focus of conversation back in his direction. After finding some topic that nobody in the group understands, I could suggest a new direction for him to lead the group in, subtly changing the group's dynamics.

Finally, making students' interactions fairer for that one day or in that one group aren't enough for me. Explicitly discussing how race, gender, class, and other differences play out among students makes all students more aware of how their (largely unconscious) actions affect others and can inhibit some students from learning. Getting everyone to participate actively in class means more than getting the shy students to speak up, it requires the outspoken ones to wait their turn more often. When everyone in my “Introduction to Proof Writing” course started recognizing that the men tended to be more confident in their proofs than the women, although the women are generally writing better proofs, it became a “fairer classroom.” In a classroom where the goal is for everyone to learn all the material (as opposed to a strictly curved classroom where the goal is for each student to do better than her peers) students’ actions can be molded in ways that support peers instead of excluding them.

Question: What are some strategies I can use to implement fairness and equality in a large classroom setting?

Answer: Strategies for larger classrooms look different but have the same underlying philosophy. Having students grapple with tough discussion questions (in groups that you assign - to avoid having anyone left out) gets everyone involved. And if some students still don't engage, reducing the discussion groups to pairs forces the issue.

When wandering around a class listening in on discussions, I find it helpful to initially ignore the content and instead focus on each group's interactions. Is someone left out? If so, have them slide their chair in closer or remind the students that the goal is for everyone in the group to understand, not just for the group as a whole to collectively arrive at a satisfactory answer. After a first pass around the room to assess if all are involved, I then use my subsequent group visits to focus on the material. I find the discussions on my latter visits fairer because of the early adjustments made to the groups.

In large part, the reason our classrooms do not provide equal opportunities to all students is because social interactions (both student-student and student-teacher) tend to privilege some students over others. The strategies discussed above all boil down to fighting social inequity with a more powerful social force: community. By creating and fostering a supportive learning community within your classroom, you can get closer to that unattainable ideal of fairness.

"Much like the "more perfect nation" laid out in our founding documents; I am continually working to make my classroom a fairer place, ..."