Creating Equity-Centered Learning Environments
Resource for Group Facilitators & Service Providers

CONTEXT

UVic has strong values and high standards related to anti-oppression and decolonization. As a facilitator or service provider with UVic, you play an integral role in creating a welcoming, inclusive, and caring environment for all participants. Our vision is to create learning and work environments that centre equity, question colonial practices, and are free from intentional or unintentional bias, barriers, and microaggressions.

We are all in different places in our personal learning journeys around reconciliation, decolonization, and equity-centred practices. With this in mind, we wanted to provide clear expectations and resources so that you can create considerate and supportive experiences for UVic people.

This document couldn't exist without the thousands of small moments of comprehension for each of us. Specifically, we acknowledge the Elders in residence at UVic who continue to share their teachings, wisdoms, and knowledges with us. We wish to express our sincere and immense thanks to all the people who have shared their insights about white supremacy, colonialism, ableism, and other forms of oppression that limit participation and success in learning environments.

We also acknowledge that this is a living document and will continue to evolve as we continue to expand our language and awareness of these topics. Our hope is that we can help and learn from each other. Please reach out if you have any questions or suggestions on how we can improve.

The next section provides some concrete strategies to get you started. We know that even with the best checklist, promoting a learning culture that values, supports and engages all participants, especially those from equity deserving groups, requires intentionality, openness, and humility. Deep listening, being open to feedback, expressing gratitude to participants, being critical of your own biases, sitting with discomfort, and inviting accountability are just some of the strategies that can help create this culture. As an experienced facilitator/trainer, you may be aware of other equity-building facilitation strategies. Please feel free to share your knowledge with us to enhance our practice.

PRACTICES AND RESOURCES

Acknowledge Indigenous Peoples and Territories
Begin with a territory acknowledgement. We see this as a vital step towards decolonization. UVic has worked with local Indigenous communities to create the following phrasing that you could use as a starting point:

We acknowledge and respect the Lək̓ʷəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the University of Victoria stands, and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

Resource: [University of Victoria Territory Acknowledgement](#)

Self-locate
Introduce and situate yourself – this is a personal act, dependent on your comfort with how much you want to share. A good place to begin are your pronouns and relationships to Indigenous land and language. You might also include sharing things like:
- Who are you? Not just your job – but what brought you to do the work you do?
- What are you passionate about? What are your hopes for the future?
- Who are your family and ancestors? (e.g., "my mother's side of the family comes from a village north Barcelona. My grandparents were resourceful farmers and my ancestors spoke Catalan")
- Whose land are you on? Try checking [Native Land Digital](#) if you're unsure.

- What are your intersecting identities? What's unique and special about you?
- Who supports you on your living and learning journey? (e.g., family, friends, mentors, pets, etc.)

Note: It's also okay to acknowledge gaps and erasures. Adoption, displacement, colonialism, and challenging family relationships can all result in a lack of easy answers to questions about family and ancestry. A helpful script might be: "Stories about my family and ancestry weren't passed down to me and I have not been able to recover them."

Resource: Feel free to watch this Inclusive Identities video for more inspiration

Affirm your Values

Consider if your organization/website has an anti-racism statement or values you might share as part of your bio
Resource: a good example comes from Amanda Fenton

Create Space for Multiple Ways of Knowing and Learning

Incorporate a range of teaching/facilitation styles that reflect different ways of knowing and learning
Resource: Pulling Together: A Guide for Teachers and Instructors

Carefully Review Content and Language

Review your materials for images, language, or references that may be outdated or no longer appropriate in our current context. Some areas to consider are:

Cultural Appropriation

Review aspects of your business (name, website, images, etc.) through the lens of cultural appropriation
Resource: Think Before you Appropriate

Colonial and Racist Language

Be mindful of using expressions or terms that have colonial or racist origins (e.g., circle the wagons, first world problem, blacklisted, etc.)
Resource: Words and Phrases you May Want to Think Twice about Using

Ableist Language

Be mindful of using expressions that stigmatize disabilities (e.g., falling on deaf ears, that's crazy, etc.) or normalize one way of being (e.g., you could say "let's go next door" rather than "let's walk next door" so you include wheelchair users).
Resource: Instead of these Ableist Words, Use Inclusive Language at Work

Gender Inclusive and Neutral Terminology

Be mindful of using gender inclusive language in your resources and when speaking.
Resource: 42 Everyday Gender-Neutral Terms to Use

Address Absences and Gaps

Reflect on who is present and centered in your content. For instance, are all the examples of leaders you reference white men? Notice who is present (or absent) in pictures of people in your content? Do you acknowledge historic and ongoing inequities? (e.g., giving a talk on mental health practices without acknowledging how racialized, trans, disabled, and queer people have been underserved, stigmatized, and oppressed by mental health systems)
Resource: Liberatory Design: Mindsets and modes to design for equity

Increase Access

Reflect on the accessibility of your materials and how you deliver content. This is a big topic, but some things to think about are:

- Circulate slides or other materials in advance of sessions or events
- Give an auditory description of any visuals (e.g., describe the images you use in your slide deck)
- Allow flexibility in participation (e.g., allow participants to pass if asked to speak in front of a group or keep their cameras off)
- Use large fonts and high contrast colours for any presentation materials, slides, and signage
- Provide breaks and ensure that they are long enough for all participants to use the bathroom (i.e., 10 mins or more)

Resource: More information on accessibility for in-person events: Accessible Events Checklist and Resources and more information on accessibility for Zoom events: Tips for Hosting More Accessible Meetingshttps://blog.zoom.us/host-more-accessible-meetings/

Apologize & Model Accountability

We will all make mistakes as we engage in this work. Perfection is not a realistic goal. If you do catch yourself in a slip-up in a learning-context, apologise with sincerity, and without naming your intent. Then move on with your content. If someone is brave enough to share a slip-up you made, but didn't realize, thank them for their courage and apologize.
Resource: The Four Parts of Accountability & How To Give A Genuine Apology

Afterwards, you might reflect on actions you can take for personal accountability (e.g., learn about a topic, practice a skill, sit with feelings of discomfort, journal about your reflections, etc.).
Resource: Safe and Brave Spaces Don't Work (and What You Can Do Instead)

SHARING OUR GRATITUDE

There were also a few people who cultivated big learning moments who we wanted to acknowledge publicly. Clinton Kuzio was instrumental in identifying a need for change in communication with facilitators about our learning practices and starting us down the path to creating this resource. The idea that spaces can still feel empty despite implementing an accessibility checklist is informed by the writing of Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha in *Care Work*. The sections on how to situate yourself and creating accountable spaces are directly linked to words and ideas shared by Yahlnaaw in her *Kil Kaahl$_G$alangdal* – *"Hear Someone's Voice Before You See Them"* session. Clinton, Leah, and Yahlnaaw, we're deeply grateful for the ways you have shared your knowledge and challenged us to do better.