

How to Create an Antiracist Classroom: Basic Guidelines for Saint Mary's College of California Faculty

As educators, it is our responsibility to create learning environments that feel safe for all of our students. Because we live in a white supremacist society that particularly targets our Black and African American community members, it is especially important that we are mindful of how our classroom environments are experienced by these students. Here are some basic guidelines to help you start to create an antiracist classroom. These guidelines are by no means all inclusive; they are just a beginning.

“Antiracist teachers . . . view the success of [B]lack students as central to the success of their own teaching. . . I knew that it was my responsibility to invite [my Black students] into the classroom and then to see, push, and protect them once they were there.” -Pirette Mckamey

DO:

- **Understand your own racial/cultural identity. See and honor the identities of your students.** Communicate your interest in hearing your students' experiences as cultural beings with intersecting identities, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, ability, etc. It is your responsibility to create a safe space for students to share their experiences and get to know each other.
- **Create a curriculum with Black and African American students in mind.** This has often been overlooked. Include works written by Black authors, and works about the real history of our country. For every topic covered in the class, integrate readings about the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.
- **Understand that your Black and African American students are traumatized.** Our Black and African American community members are, to varying degrees and in different ways, traumatized by living in a white supremacist society. Consider having daily check ins with the class, or check in individually with Black students throughout the semester.
- **Foster respectful dialogues by collectively establishing classroom ground rules.** Create brave spaces. Consider offering participation-style points around your ground rules.
- **Be aware of and name aggressions, including how you might enact them.** Have a conversation about microaggressions, as they are common in the classroom. Talk about the steps that will be taken to address aggressions that occur in the classroom.
- **Pay attention to how your Black students are responding to discussions on race.** Take note if a student appears to be or reports being wounded by a micro- or macro aggression. Check in with them after class and respect their space if they don't want to talk. Ask them for any suggested reparations (e.g., healing circle) or changes to course process.
- **Own your mistakes.** Establish as a class at the beginning of the semester that everyone will make mistakes, you included. Allow yourself to mess up, accept yourself as human, own your error, apologize, and explain what you will do to avoid it happening again.
- **Be mindful of the authority you hold as professor and grader.** It is important to remember that your students experience you as an authority figure with positional power.

DON'T:

- **Say, “I don’t see color,”** [sidetrack or end conversations on race, sit silently, or appease](#). These actions erase the identities and experiences of your students and re-traumatize them. Your silence conveys the message that you are complicit with white supremacy.
- **Be defensive or say, “I am not a racist.”** Realize that all humans carry bias, and being racist is not a categorical distinction. Rather, it is a matter of degree. [Examine your biases, accept that you have them, and work to dismantle them](#). Take a [Harvard Implicit Bias Test](#) to assess your level of implicit bias.
- **Use the “N” word.** This is an incredibly painful word, and it should not be used in the classroom. If you are reading a historical text written by a Black author in which this word is used, do not repeat it or read it out loud. This is especially true for white students and professors. It is *never* acceptable for a white person to use, repeat, or read this word out loud.
- **Mandate that students use their video during Zoom classes.** Students who are racially traumatized might be more comfortable with video off, particularly if you’re discussing sensitive topics such as race. Allow your students the privacy that they need. It’s okay to ask students to turn on their cameras for certain activities *if they feel comfortable*, but this should not be a requirement at all times.
- **Call on your Black students to speak for Black people.** More generally, you really should not ask anyone at any time to speak on behalf of any of their identities.
- **Don’t make assumptions about someone’s identities based on how you perceive them.**

Additional Resources:

1. [UC Berkeley Race Matters Resource List](#)
2. [27 Mistakes White Teachers of Black Students Make and How to Fix Them](#)
3. [What Antiracist Teachers Do Differently](#)
4. [White Teachers Need to Check Their Racism Before Teaching It](#)
5. [Becoming an Antiracist Educator](#)
6. [Antiracist Pedagogy](#)
7. [Barriers and Strategies by White Faculty Who Incorporate Anti-Racist Pedagogy](#)
8. [Antiracist Resources for Your 2020-2021 Teaching](#)

**This document was created by SMC staff and faculty. Please feel free to share. **