A focus on diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging in nursing education syllabus

Cristian Mendoza Ruvalcaba, DNP, APRN, FNP-C, CPNP-PC; Jodiey Bondurant, DNP, CPNP-PC/AC, FNP-BC, School of Nursing, Oregon Health and Science University

Keywords

DEIB, Student-Centered, Teaching Innovation, Syllabus

Abstract

Background: Integrating Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) principles into nursing education is critical to preparing healthcare professionals who can effectively address the complex health needs of diverse populations. Nursing education often reflects institutional values, yet the explicit inclusion of DEIB-focused language and practices in course syllabi remains underutilized. The syllabus serves as a foundational document for outlining course expectations, policies, and resources. A review of the literature reveals a gap in the comprehensive dissemination of best practices for integrating DEIB into course syllabi. A descriptive analysis by Gallo et al. (2022) found inconsistent use of university-recommended policy statements in their study. The authors emphasize the significance of the syllabus as a representation of professor and university priorities, urging that it must explicitly communicate inclusive language, teaching strategies, and policies. Additionally, Sumo et al. (2021) advocate for the development of DEI syllabus statements by teams well-versed in DEI principles. Fuentes et al. (2021) and Lowenthal et al. (2020) suggest that supplementary syllabus language on the subject of DEI can foster a DEI mindset, enhancing social presence and understanding within courses. Further supporting this, Kobeissi et al. (2024) highlight the need for future research to evaluate student and faculty attitudes regarding the inclusion of DEI statements in syllabi.Building on this evidence, we redesigned the syllabus for NURS780 – Essentials of Affirming LGBTQ+ Healthcare to model best practices in inclusive education.

Research Question/Innovation/Goal: Can the incorporation of DEIB-focused elements in a graduate-level nursing syllabus foster an enhanced feeling of inclusivity, equity, and belonging among students?

Methods: As part of the primary presenter's participation in the Fostering Respectful & Equitable Education Certification Program, we redesigned the syllabus for NURS780 Essentials of Affirming LGBTQ+ Healthcare. Our primary resource was the Equitable Syllabus Checklist by Graciela Vidal, Sarah Jacobs, and Justi Echeles. Statements/Messages included:
Welcoming message: acknowledging diverse experiences in education based on aspects of identity.

Course Vision Message
- Anti-Racist Teaching Philosophy Statement
- Diversity and Inclusion Statement
- Land Acknowledgment Statement
- Gender Identity Affirming Syllabus Statement
- Name Pronunciation Statement
- Informational message about the OHSU Student CARE Program

The syllabus was piloted in Winter 2025 and will be evaluated using a mixed-methods approach, utilizing post-course surveys with qualitative and quantitative feedback from students.

Impact/Effectiveness: The redesigned syllabus serves as a model for embedding DEIB principles into educational materials. The creation of formal evaluations are underway to assess changes in student perceptions of inclusivity, equity, and belonging.

Findings/Results: While formal results will be available after the Winter 2025 course, we anticipate that the students perceive the syllabus as reflective of an inclusive and equitable approach to education. The findings of this research will underscore the potential for syllabus design to influence student engagement and success.

Impact/Effectiveness: The redesigned syllabus serves as a model for embedding DEIB principles into educational materials. The creation of formal evaluations are underway to assess changes in student perceptions of inclusivity, equity, and belonging.

Findings/Results: While formal results will be available after the Winter 2025 course, we anticipate that the students perceive the syllabus as reflective of an inclusive and equitable approach to education. The findings of this research will underscore the potential for syllabus design to influence student engagement and success.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: This project prioritizes DEIB by actively addressing systemic inequities in education. The inclusion of affirming language, culturally responsive practices, and student-centered resources demonstrates a commitment to advancing health equity through education.

Possible Applications: The strategies and tools presented in this project are highly adaptable across disciplines within health sciences education. Beyond nursing, faculty in other programs can adopt these practices to align course materials with institutional DEIB goals. The faculty of this course will present the process of this innovative teaching approach in the February APRN-DNP faculty semi-annual meeting.

Learning Objectives

- By the end of the snap talk, the participant will be able to describe the role of inclusive syllabus design in promoting student engagement and equity.
- By the end of the snap talk, the participant will be able to identify and apply specific DEIB-focused elements to course syllabi.
- By the end of the snap talk, the participant will identify key resources for further consultation and learning opportunities in creating a more equitable and inclusive course syllabus.

This work represents a significant step in leveraging educational tools to create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment, aligning with the broader goal of reducing health disparities through education.

References

1. Fuentes, M. A., Zelaya, D. G., & Madsen, J. W. (2021). Rethinking the course syllabus: Considerations for promoting equity, diver- sity, and inclusion. Teaching of Psychology, 48(1), 69–79. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0098628320959979
2. Gallo, V. J., Cotton, S., Theeke, L., Barnhart, C., Marino, L., Messer, J., Minor, A., & Smother, A. (2022). Evidence of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Nursing Syllabi: A Descriptive Analysis. Journal of Nursing Education, 61(12), 665-671. https://journals.healio.com/doi/10.3928/01484834-20221003-02?url_ver=Z39.88-2003&rfr_id=ori:rid:crossref.org&rfr_dat=cr_pub%20%200pubmed
3. Kobeissi, M., Kearney, K., Christopherson, K., & Ramirez, E. (2024). The Syllabus: A Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Nursing Education. Journal of Nursing Education, 63(9), 634-637. https://journals.healio.com/doi/10.3928/01484834-20240321-01
4. Lowenthal, P. R., Humphrey, M., Conley, Q., Dunlap, J. C., Greear, K., Lowenthal, A., & Giacumo, L. A. (2020). Creating accessible and in- clusive online learning: Moving beyond compliance and broadening the discussion. Quarterly Review of Distance Education, 21(2), 1–21. https://web-p-ebscohost-com.liboff.ohsu.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=f65dcf19-7899-4768-be2d-35684818fb36%40redis`
5. Sumo, J., Staffileno, B., Warner, K., Arrieta, M., & Salinas, I. (2021). The development of an online diversity and inclusion community: Promoting a culture of inclusion within a college of nursing. Journal of Professional Nursing, 37(1), 18-23. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S875572232030199X?via%3Dihub`