Privilege in the Classroom
University Of Michigan Inclusive Teaching

It is important to recognize how your privilege and your students' privilege may manifest in the classroom and how it can impact the climate for students and instructors who lack privilege. Many resources on the LSA Inclusive Teaching website are devoted to addressing privilege and oppression in the classroom, from the construction of your syllabus to creating an inclusive classroom learning environment. But it is worth taking time to familiarize yourself explicitly with some of the ways that privilege can impact your experience and your students' experience of the classroom.

Some Ways that Your Privilege May Impact You	• If your students read you as white, gender-conforming, male, able-bodied, and affluent, they likely perceive you as a person of intelligence and authority, which may benefit you in student course evaluations and the ways your students engage with you in class. • If you experience privilege, you can assume that many of your students, if not most, likely share your identity and privilege and that they will not be biased against you. • If you do not experience disabilities or language barriers, you are likely better able to meet the expectations of workload and grading turn-around than some of your colleagues who lack those kinds of privilege. • If you experience privilege, the standard canon for your field of study is likely written by people who share your identity or identities. And you can teach that canon without students or peers suggesting that your course is political or overly topical.
Some Ways Instructor Privilege May Impact Students Who Don't Share that Privilege	• Students who do not experience privilege may worry that their instructor and peers are biased against them and their worldview. • If a student's identity is not well represented in the syllabus or shared among their peers, they may fear that their experiences, interests, and perspectives will be treated as marginal, off-topic, or overly political. And they may worry that they will be asked to speak for their entire social group (for example, that they may be called on to provide "the Muslim perspective" or have their experience objectified as a "teachable moment" or "inspirational story"). • Students may worry that they cannot depend on the instructor to identify harmful comments or behavior in the classroom and that you may not support them if they call-out those harmful comments and behavior themselves. • If a student has language barriers (such as from speaking English as a secondary language, having a disability that impacts their processing of written or spoken language, or having grown up speaking a dialect of English that is not commonly valued in the college classroom), they may be concerned that the instructor and their peers will think that they are underprepared for the course or that the instructor might not take those obstacles into account when they evaluate their work.

	• If a student requires an accommodation in order to manage the course requirements, they may fear that the instructor will doubt the validity of their needs, demand documentation that they don't have, judge them adversely for needing an accommodation, or express other resistances to providing an accommodation that the student will have to defend against.
Addressing Your Privilege in the Classroom	The above lists are a small sampling of the ways instructor privilege can impact the classroom, but they are far from exhaustive. It is important that you recognize that student concerns about how your privilege may impact them are often based on previous negative experiences. The good news is there are concrete things you can do to mitigate the impact your privilege has on your classroom and students. • **Do your research and hold yourself accountable.** Research is a crucial step in becoming aware of and attending to your privilege and biases. Because privileged identities tend to be the most normalized, it is sometimes difficult to recognize how they impact our worldview and our teaching. Just by reading this document, you are already taking a step toward doing better. Take further steps by reading the resources hyperlinked and browsing the Inclusive Teaching website. All our catalogue of resources, activities, and readings have been specifically curated to help you address the impact of privilege and oppression in your classroom. • **Choose activities that will be inclusive of all identities and avoid objectifying oppression**. Again, the resources on this site are a great starting place for choosing activities that will help you build an inclusive learning community with your students. • **Construct a reading list that includes many insights from authors who do not share your privileged identities and include readings that address privilege and oppression specifically.** Ideally, you should have more than one representative from a particular social group, and you should select those readings with as much care as you selected every other reading on your list. A reading list that shows many voices from various backgrounds and identities will not only avoid erasure and tokenism, it will also help students build confidence that their contribution in your class, the university, and in their field of study matters and will be heard and valued. • **Include inclusive language in your syllabus.** Your syllabus should show evidence that you will be receptive to student needs and that you will treat your students with respect. For example, if participation is required for success in your class, consider writing something along these lines in your syllabus: ○ *"Effective participation means being prepared, engaged, respectful, and following the discussion community ground-rules. In the discussion section, participation in discussion is a crucial element of developing a learning community. That said, if*

	you anticipate that participating in discussion will be a major obstacle for you (such as due to anxiety, disability, or a language barrier), please come see me early in the semester and we can brainstorm alternative ways for you to participate meaningfully in class discussion." ○ This wording shows that you recognize that there are valid reasons why daily participation will be challenging for some students and that you are willing to work with students to meet their needs while maintaining high expectations for meaningful engagement. Alternatively, you could include a variety of ways that students can meet your participation requirements. Such as specifying a requirement that they can either contribute to the discussion verbally in class or write a 100-word response to a question raised in class to be submitted to you within 24 hours of your class meeting. • **Listen to your students, take their perspectives seriously, and encourage your other students to do the same.** While you should not depend on your students to educate you about privilege and oppression, they will undoubtedly offer insight that you have not considered. Avoid being dismissive or defensive if students offer perspectives that challenge your own. Setting discussion guidelines with your students can help you achieve this goal. • **Be willing to acknowledge your errors and commit to doing better.** For example, if you mispronounce your student's name, use the wrong pronouns for them, or were dismissive of a marginalized student's perspective in favor of a dominant narrative, apologize, correct yourself, and be more attentive to not repeating that error in the future.
Additional Resources on Privilege in the Classroom	"Speaker Sex and Perceived Apportionment of Talk" by Anne Cutler and Donia R. Scott "How do we teach about privilege" "Bias Against Female Instructors" by Colleen Flaherty "How Student Evaluations Are Skewed Against Women and Minorities" by Eva Lilienfeld "I Am Not Your Teachable Moment" a comic by Robot Hugs "'We Have Always Fought': Challenging the 'Women, Cattle and Slaves' Narrative" by Kameron Hurley