

*Teaching in Today's Community Colleges: Who Are Our Students?*  
*Written By Eileen Anderson*

More than any other time in their 100 Year history, enrollment in community colleges is mirroring the make-up of the population at large. It is not uncommon for classes to have many languages spoken by the students or to have students who are just beginning to understand and speak English. It is also common for classes to be made up of yet-to-graduate high school students as well as senior citizens for whom our courses are good buys.

**REF-0200**

*How many different ethnic backgrounds are represented in the students you teach?*

*Have there been surprises for you as get to know them?*

As you get to know your students, it will be quickly obvious they are a very different student body than those on our campuses in the past. Our students – of any and all age groups and diverse backgrounds – consider themselves to be *consumers* in the educational marketplace. They fully anticipate that our product will be diverse and flexible enough to meet *their* needs and that it will be delivered at the time, location, and pace of *their* choosing. Adding another note is the emerging availability of courses on the internet. It is yet to be seen how electronic learning will impact us all.

**Educating for Inclusion in Multicultural Classes**

All of us are coming to grips with the need to meet

**More Fast Facts about Our Students\***

**Student Profile:**

44% of all U.S. undergraduates  
45% of all first-time freshmen  
58% women; 42% men  
63% part time; 37% full time  
(full-time = 12+ credit hours)

46% of black undergraduates  
55% of Hispanic  
46% of Asian/Pacific Islanders  
55% of Native American

Average student age – 29 years

**Welfare Reform:**

48% of community colleges offer welfare-to-work programs. Of those that do not, 54% plan to offer programs specifically designed for welfare recipients.

**Healthcare:**

65% of new healthcare workers get their training at community colleges.

**For on-line help with student diversity, open this website:**



<http://www.main.nc.uc.diversity>

\* Statistics from National Profile of Community Colleges: Trends and Statistics: *Third Edition (2000)* available from Community College Press. (Not from the Internet)  
**Tips for Inclusive Teaching\***

- Teaching for diversity means teaching to the individual.

one of the most challenging of the goals of our community colleges – meeting the needs of students who are part of a minority. All of us need to look again at our teaching methods as well as the very syllabi we follow to be sure they are suitable for the students we meet.

Fortunately, the strategies that have proven to work in educating students of diversity *are* those that we are familiar with. They’ve worked for us before and will work again – with some new insights added!

**Begin where you know HOW to begin:**

- Get to know each student as an individual rather than as a representative of a particular group. Use all the strategies you have mastered to get to know students’ by name as soon as possible. Help students get to use each other’s names as a priority! Project a warm, welcoming, accepting attitude.
- Find out all that you can about your students’ interests, beliefs, and values. Assume nothing. Your campus probably will have a group whose mission it is to help these students feel a comfortable part of the student body. *Ask for help!*
- Invite your students to write short biographies.
- Students who belong to the same cultures tend to group together. They will need time and your patience to feel at ease joining other sub-groups in your class. You will probably guess wrong when you first try to set-up groups for in-class projects. Be patient with yourself and your group.
- Be aware that many cultures do not place a value on being assertive communicators. In some cultures, *silence* is the dominant value.

- Plan to accommodate different learning styles in your courses.
- Verbally aggressive students are often perceived as being the brighter students in the class. **DO NOT MAKE THIS ERROR!**
- Never ask one student to speak for a whole culture group.
- In discussions, first, call on verbal students to respond. Then, call on students who are shy or less fluent for personal responses, opinions etc.
- Do not allow hurtful statements.
- Try to allow more than your usual time for responses to your questions. Suggest that those who wish might jot a few notes before you ask for responses as you begin the discussion.
- Review your syllabus. Does it allow for as wide as possible a choice of learning activities and learning styles?
- If applicable, does your course suggest materials reflective of contributors from other culture groups?
- Encourage students to **communicate** with one another via e-mail.

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***Non-Standard English***

Recognize the difference between *discourse communities* using *non-standard English* and the need to prepare students for entry into professional and business communities using *standard English*. Help all students appreciate the diversity of linguistic cultures.

The popularity and wide usage of e-mail has encouraged students to lapse into *e-lingo* when more formal usage is called for. All faculty members need to prevent a lowering of standards in their disciplines.

**TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION  
on**

- Some students feel more comfortable with written responses than contributing verbally to discussions. From time-to-time (especially in the beginning) allow time for written responses to your discussion questions then invite students who wish to read their notes aloud. Other students can then build on this start.
- If part of your course grade is based on class participation, be certain students know this early on. Be aware that you will want to provide extra help for students from other culture groups for whom English is not their first language.
- Do your best but do not let yourself be overwhelmed by the fear of unintentionally offending or alienating students by a slip of the tongue. It is not necessary to re-work your whole teaching style at once. One new “insight” a day will help!



*Do you have some successful strategies for working with students for whom English is a second language that might help all of us? Please share these on WebCT.*

*Does your campus provide help for non-English speaking students or students who speak non-standard English? Please share what you have found on WebCT.*

#### **More Related Web Links**



**“Diversity Web is an Interactive Resource Hub for Higher Education”**

<http://www.diversityweb.org/>

*This URL will open to the Home Page. From there, click one of the many excellent links to resources for inclusive teaching.*