**Preparing Arts Management Courses to Engage in DEI Practices**

Elena SV Flys
Julie Voelker-Morris

For the past year, the two authors of this article have been sharing examples of ways we lead conversations and address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in our core courses. We have been asking ourselves questions such as,

- What barriers exist in our own teaching practices and ways of addressing course content that limit student engagement in challenging questions?
- What tools or resources exist to revise and develop more inclusive pedagogical approaches, classroom activities, assignment structures, or classroom management practices?
- What opportunities exist for us to change course structures so that students have greater personal ownership, investment, and agency in the work of the courses?

We each find that modeling inclusive and equitable practices in classroom settings assists in preparing our students to enact similar practices with their staff, boards, and audience members in their future roles as arts workers and leaders. We further know that this work is urgent based on guidelines and calls to action from the arts and culture sector and arts educators (ArtEquity, Association of Arts Administration Educators, Oregon Shakespeare Festival FAIR Experience).

In examining DEI related learning outcomes in our own educational settings, we the authors, have more recently narrowed our conversations toward creating two articles on teaching and learning for AJAM "Teaching Notes." These two articles will focus on ways we find we have direct influence and impact in our classrooms. In these articles we discuss ways to prepare ourselves and our students to engage in DEI conversations and activities. For this first article, we have narrowed our focus into two conversations:

1. developing classroom syllabi and contracts to support all course participants in contributing to important conversations about field-based theory and practices of diversity, equity, and inclusion issues, and
2. activities and class settings that help both faculty and students in understanding their own biases – and provide tools for how to acknowledge and address personal biases in classroom settings.

Overall, we have found that changes we have made to include DEI practices in our arts management courses have helped us improve our teaching practices. We describe some stops and starts along the way. We provide example activities through which we scaffold conversations to address course content and DEI learning outcomes. Finally, we share how naming inequitable practices and working to improve and embed more inclusive practices in classroom settings allow us to enhance our individual teaching practices.

We will share a second article more specifically focused on classroom settings and management exercises in an upcoming issue of AJAM.

**Syllabus Preparation**

We each asked ourselves to review how many syllabi have we written and how many times we have recycled our syllabi from one year to the next. The first step was to consider the information included in the syllabus on a regular basis. As Wood & Madden (n.d) stated, "the syllabus does much to set the tone for a course and is typically the first textual contact students have with their instructors." Thus, we asked ourselves if we are being conscious and inclusive, including language from a DEI perspective? A review of SV Flys' syllabi showed that although she had incorporated the information regarding the university Disability Resource Center and the inclusion of sensitive topics in the materials for several years, she had not explicitly included a statement inviting and welcoming students from different backgrounds to discuss their unique learning experiences within the class. Once included, SV Flys noticed that the use of this specific syllabus statement (see sidebar) helped welcome as well as encourage the creation of an environment for everyone to voice their views and accept different points of view. Moreover, SV Flys included this statement as part of the first day's slideshow presentation unpacking with students the meaning of the statement. The class discussed what the statement entailed for all of the people - including SV Flys as the instructor -- in the classroom, framing its relevance for the rest of the course.

Like SV Flys, Voelker-Morris has long included syllabi statements about the campus Accessible Education Center and controversial topics being important to class discussions and activities. Through our recent challenge to examine syllabi, Voelker-Morris has now included additional DEI statements regarding: a) accommodations for religious festivals that are not university holidays (see sidebar) and b) support for mental health, survivor support, and other aspects of student caring. For example, this latter syllabus statement notes that the faculty member will express concerns to an individual student who may appear to need additional support, the reasons for any concern, and remind the student of campus or local resources that might be helpful. It also notes that the faculty member is not inquiring about any details of any students' situation or serve as the de facto help, but that help is available should the student like to know about resources of support.

However, revision of statements like these in our syllabi still needs to continue. For instance, Wood and Madden (2016) discuss location of disability statements within a syllabus and the headings used for such statements. Wood and Madden further suggest that including disability statements at the beginning of a syllabus shows an instructor's flexible approach and

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**Sample Syllabus DEI Statement** by Elena SV Flys and Diane Winder

This course is committed to providing a positive, inclusive classroom environment. Together we intend to serve students' learning needs both in and out of class, and to view the diversity that we all bring to class as a resource, strength, and benefit. This atmosphere of learning supports a diversity of thoughts, perspectives, and experiences, and honors our multifaceted identities (including race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, ability, culture, and many others). Our goal as a class will be to engage in civil discussion with care and empathy for others by developing a trusting and safe environment.

If you feel like your performance in the class is being impacted by your experiences either in or outside of class, please do not hesitate to talk with me. I want to be a resource for you. I (like many people) am still in the process of learning about diverse perspectives and identities. Student suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. If something was said in class (by anyone) that made you feel uncomfortable, please talk to me about it, and please know that anonymous feedback is always an option.

interest to "provid[e] an inclusive and accessible classroom for all students." Further, the authors mention the importance of choosing statement names that strive for full inclusion of class participants rather than labels that promote exclusion. Thus, as authors of this article, we acknowledge that our statements and practices will continue evolving with the purpose of achieving inclusivity.

**Contract Development with the Class**

Following the examination of syllabi, we examined how we create opportunities for meaningful classroom conversations. One key tool that arose was the use of course agreements for participation. Considering syllabi a course contract, Voelker-Morris has regularly included a syllabus statement on shared responsibilities in any class learning community.  This statement, adapted from Batterson (2004), articulates that multiple interpretations, questions, and ideas from participants in any course taught by Voelker-Morris are welcome and encouraged. Much of this statement takes a feminist approach to course design and learning (Vanderbilt Center for Teaching, 2015) while also building on university stated policies regarding intolerance of abusive or discriminatory language or actions. Beyond the statement itself, Voelker-Morris introduces the concepts of shared classroom learning in conversation with students in her individual class settings. Voelker-Morris is again reviewing these statements and related course contracting around discussion practiced based on recent strategies SV Flys incorporated that are next described.

SV Flys began incorporating course discussion agreements via the use of class "rules and norms" guidelines for a research graduate course. This process started by setting instructor-imposed ground rules that were then shared with the students.  These rules quickly ended unsuccessfully. SV Flys had to reframe her approach. In a workshop organized by the team of Thinking Collaborative (Adaptive Schools Seminars), Carolyn McKanders mentioned the importance of engagement and reflection, meaning that if students were not engaged or able to reflect in the process of creating a safe space and rules, they would not be engaged at all. Thus, the following semester, SV Flys revised the class rules process and facilitated the creation of the ground rules on the first day of class. This process ultimately turned into a list of "Do nots…" rather than a constructive list to participation agreements. Also, accountability to maintain the contract was questionable: having the professor as the facilitator of the contract implied that power dynamics were in place. Although, this approach worked better than the first, yet, there were still some elements to be considered and revised. Therefore, during the most recent semester, SV Flys invited the Associate Director of the Wellness and Community Responsibility Office at Eastern Michigan University to facilitate the generation of the contract. This allowed for the faculty of the course to be a member of the group establishing those ground rules rather than imposing the ground rules on the students. The areas of this class agreement included, for example, conversational turn-taking where students came with their own ideas of how to utilize arm gestures to let their peers and professor know if they wanted to answer, add, or change the topic. The facilitator encouraged students to talk about the importance of having a balanced conversation (e.g., interruptions, monopolizing conversations), and respecting different points of

| **Sample Religious Holiday Festivals Statement** by Julie Voelker-Morris, adapted from Saurabh Lall (2019) |
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| Many lunar calendar-based festivals do not appear in the standard calendar. Please let me know of any exams or assignments that overlap with religious festivals (Yom Kippur, Eid, Diwali, etc.) that are not university holidays so we can make alternative arrangements. Also, please let me know if you need accommodations in class/exams on a festival day (e.g., if you are fasting). |

view (e.g., suspend judgment, meet everyone where they are). All class members brainstormed strategies to ensure best practices for communicating with group members (e.g., differences between professional and personal communication, respect break times, best ways to communicate via email), and how to handle charged moments (e.g., responsibility each individual has when we talk). Among other actions, students suggested theatrical exercises such as "Oops Ouch" to help peers acknowledge when a comment had triggered someone else and to unpack the situation. Changes in the agreement dynamics are identified in the class contracts comparison chart below.

| Class Contracts Comparison Chart | |
|---|---|
| **First Contract: Faculty as Facilitator** | **Second Contract: External Facilitator** |
| 1. Avoid ad hominem speech - keep your personal biases and assumptions aside. Avoid assumptions; ask first. | 1. Respect: Participate in good intentions; assume good intentions in others; provide justification from the perspective (advance arguments while acknowledging disagreement exists). |
| 2. Apologize for your actions, not someone else's reactions. If you have overstepped, keep it about you, don't make it about them. Apologize about your own reactions as well. | 2. Ourselves: Meet each other where we are at; respect boundaries; acknowledge we have different perspectives and experiences |
| 3. If the dynamic of the room is getting too heated, anyone can say "Spain!" and we will all take a breath and reset. Use non-aggressive language. | 3. Crisis: When group conversation derails: "forced five"; review contract; have mindful moment.<br>  a. Leave the classroom quietly as needed.<br>  b. "ism's" and difficult discussions: when "ism's" are called out, it is important to follow up with a statement with the understanding that we might not be able to change an individual's perspective. |

**Activities to understand biases and assumptions**

The underlying goal of including specific course activities that seek to examine both student and faculty biases and assumptions is teaching toward the future (Crawford, B, 2016). That is, what is the inheritance that students will have and how are we creating what will be the diverse arts

management workforce 5-20 years from now (Arts Consulting Group, 2019)? In addition, we need to think about how we practice such examinations in our classrooms now, reflecting on our whole communities, particularly as demographics and needs change. Cultural competency is continual work.

Below are two interrelated example activities the authors have used that provide a brief glimpse into processes addressing assumptions and biases over any specific product. The goal of these activities is two-fold: a) for students to understand ways in which power and privilege, based on sociocultural positionality, can assist or impede others; and, b) for students to be able to apply these concepts when navigating their professional paths. Any course activities like these would build off readings that the class has already completed and begun to discuss or reviewed in advance of the workshop.

Voelker-Morris often includes activities that ask students to examine and reflect upon their own biases, privileges, and differences, explicit and implicit.  One example asks students to write the word "power" in the center of a piece of paper.  In 30 seconds or less, students are then asked to write or draw a working definition in response to the question, "What is power?" Students are asked to pair up with a class colleague, share their definitions, and discuss similarities or differences in these definitions. Students are then invited to change their initial definition of power, if desired. Responses to this activity often include ideas regarding access to resources that enhance one's chances of getting what one needs in order to lead a comfortable, productive, and safe life; the ability of individuals or groups to influence the beliefs or actions of other persons or groups; or that one's level of power or access to power is heavily dependent on one's social status, financial capacity, or social location (e.g. membership in social categorizations such as race, class, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, age, religion, nationality, ability, weight, etc).

Next, students are asked to imagine that they represent the U.S. population and that everyone has a chance to live the "American dream." They are requested to crumple up their paper about power and hold it in their hands. A trashcan is placed either in the front or middle of the room, dependent upon the class configuration.  Students are invited "To live the American dream, by successfully throwing your wadded-up paper into the bin while sitting in your seat."  Students near the trashcan generally succeed in getting their paper into the can.  Their odds, though perhaps not their skills or ability, make the target easier to access. This activity brings forth a visual manifestation of advantages and disadvantages that people encounter based solely on their social status and social position. Such status – power – is conferred by society to certain groups and can be difficult sometimes to see in oneself. This activity often leads to vigorous class discussion around social mobility and opportunity as well as biases that may have been previously held about others' effort, abilities, or levels of success. Further discussion and activity around identifying student's individual points of access or impasse specific to career goals, academic experiences, or employment or internship situations may also arise.

Similarly, for several courses, SV Flys has incorporated an adaptation of the "Wall of Assumptions" activity learned at a Thinking Collaborative workshop. Students are asked to list assumptions about a topic. They write them on anonymous pieces of paper. These pages are crumped into balls and thrown to the center of the classroom. The professor and two student

volunteers then each grab a ball and write the statements on the board. The professor then, with an approachable voice and using plurals and positive presuppositions, unpacks the comments with students allowing them to share their opinions, inquiries, and own assumptions that are being "re-discovered" thanks to peers. This activity allows the class to start a conversation and to leave behind student's fears to make a mistake or to have lack of knowledge regarding a specific topic.

We describe these activities generally because each of the above activities can be revised to address specific arts management contexts. Topics might include the aging and Whiteness of both arts management leaders and audiences, adapting cultural programming to changing technologies, financial barriers and opportunities for arts audiences, or addressing organizational resilience in the face of economic, health, or climate crises.

**Closing**

Through this article, we have presented ways in which we prepare some of our core courses to engage in DEI issues and conversations.  Syllabi statements, class agreements, and sample activities have helped us improve our teaching and engagement with students around addressing DEI in the classroom. By making visible the means through which we communicate and debate ideas effectively and respectfully – concepts that may otherwise be hidden or tailored to a specific racial (White) or class (middle or upper) or arts (Euro-colonial training) based communication style preference -- arts management educators make space for more equitable exchanges of ideas. These practices can assist pre-professional arts and culture workers in breaking down structural norms and including greater variability of participants in current and future arts and culture settings (Wexler, p. 23).

The authors of this article will share a future AJAM Teaching Notes article on ways in which DEI teaching practices benefit the future of the field as well as classroom settings. The focus of this second article will be more specific to issues in classrooms that help prepare our arts and culture management students for the professional world of work.

We also want to invite you, the reader, to join us in this conversation. What are your experiences addressing DEI issues and conversations with your students and your teaching practice?  What stories and examples of barriers have you encountered? What stories of success have you built into your classes? Please submit your articles in response to our examples or the questions posed above to Voelker-Morris at jvoelker@uoregon.edu. We hope that some of your voices are included alongside ours in future AJAM Teaching Notes articles.

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**Authors**
Elena SV Flys is an Assistant Professor in Arts & Entertainment Management in the Department of Communication, Media, and Theatre Arts at Eastern Michigan University.

Julie Voelker-Morris is a Senior Instructor II in the School of Planning, Public Policy, and Management at the University of Oregon.

We seek to hold open discussion about these topics and practices with you as colleagues. Please reach out to us at jvoelker@uoregon.edu and elena.sv.flys@emich.edu.