

## **Tool to scan and improve the diversity sensitivity of academic courses**

For course designers and coordinators.

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*This tool has been developed for the project 'Diversity-sensitive education' of VU Amsterdam. It is still being tested in practice and will be adapted accordingly.*

### **Purpose and use**

With this tool, you can make a diagnosis of the extent to which a course in its current form provides diversity-sensitive teaching and learning and get ideas for improvements. The tool also serves as an instrument for reflection and discussion amongst teams of teaching staff about the diversity sensitivity of the study programme. To this end, one or more meetings will be organized by the coordinator of diversity-sensitive education (DSE) of your study programme.

The tool consists of a selection of key questions about the following categories:

- rationale (reasons to pay attention to diversity)
- learning goals
- content
- assessment tasks
- teaching & learning arrangements
- inclusive education

At the end of each category of questions, a number of references is included where you will find suggestions for improvements and examples. The tool can be filled in individually, as preparation for a work session, or during a work session. The coordinator of the process will give you further instructions. You will be asked to fill in the complete tool or to focus on specific parts.

### **What is diversity-sensitive education?**

Diversity-sensitive education involves learning about and learning in diversity. Learning about diversity is part of preparing students to become professionals who are able to adequately deal with diversity themes within their professional or scientific field. Furthermore, it involves the development of 'cross-curricular' competences that are related to diversity. These are capabilities that all students of an institution, regardless of their field of study, have to acquire (for example critical reasoning and competences for academic citizenship). Learning in diversity means that the diversity within the student group is intentionally used as a resource for learning, for example by stimulating interaction and cooperation. Finally, diversity-sensitive education concerns the provision of an inclusive learning environment, in which all students, regardless of their backgrounds or characteristics, feel confident to learn and that enables them to develop their talents.

An intersectional approach to diversity lies at the basis of this guideline and the tools and resources that are part of it. Intersectionality means that somebody's social identity is not perceived in terms of just one aspect of it (such as gender, social class, religion, ethnicity, sexuality) but that these aspects together shape somebody's perceived and experienced social identity. All these different aspects coexist, mutually reinforce each other and determine the individual's unique social location. Of course, the broader social environment, characterized by privileging some social identities while

opposing others, also influences the way a person experiences his or her specific social location in society.

Despite the intersectional approach, you will notice that we sometimes do speak about different groups of students based on one aspect of social identity, for example 'international students' or 'bicultural students'. This is done because it is important to be aware of possible mechanisms of social injustice that can occur in the way teaching and learning are organized and that harm specific group of students. However, the fact that we sometimes speak about different groups does not mean that the social identity of individuals in this group is reduced to just this one aspect.

### **Theory and practice-based**

This tool is based on the diversity scans that are implemented at VU Amsterdam (2012-2016) and on national and international tools<sup>1</sup> for the development of diversity-sensitive and internationalized study programmes (see reference list). The questions do not cover all specific aspects of diversity-sensitive education but are meant as an incentive to start reflection and discussion among the teaching staff. The title of some resources may give you the idea that they are focused on just one specific aspect of diversity, such as culture or international differences (e.g. 'Quick guides on teaching and learning across cultures' or 'Internationalizing the Curriculum'). However, these sources are based on a broader definition of diversity (not limited to one aspect), in line with the definition this tool is based on.

The tool (as a whole or specific categories) can be used by individual coordinators who want to scan their course and get ideas for improvements. Furthermore, it can be part of a process of self-review at faculties or study programmes regarding diversity-sensitive education.

### **The course in relation to the programme**

Of course, the role that specific courses and modules of a study programme play in realizing programme goals related to diversity and internationalization may differ. It is important to have a focus on students' progressive development of skills, knowledge, attitudes and (self)reflection required of academic professionals in a multicultural society and globalized world across the programme as a whole. This tool is not based on the idea that all courses have to pay the same amount of attention to diversity themes. For every question you can indicate, specifically for the course you are designing or coordinating, what your ideas are about the current situation as well as the desired situation.

### **Instructions for filling in the tool**

For the different categories, you will find answer options that you are asked to consider for the current situation of the course as well as the desired situation. Every question has three answer

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<sup>1</sup> I specifically want to thank prof. dr. Betty Leask and her colleagues of 'Internationalisation of the Curriculum in Action' for their work and making it publically accessible by a creative commons license. Support for the original work was provided by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council Ltd, an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. The documents and tools they delivered have been used for the development of this tool.

options on a continuum from 1 to 3. If you think that your course best fits somewhere between two numbers, indicate the position on the scale.

For all questions, you are asked 'to elaborate' your answer, for example by describing and comparing the current and the desired situation. The elaboration or explanation you give is important for the discussion and reflection that you will have in the work session with the teaching staff about the diversity sensitivity of the study programme as a whole.

In order to be useful for all teachers and coordinators of the university, this tool is in English. You are free to fill it in in English or Dutch.

## General question:

The language in which this course is taught is:

- 1 English
- 2 Dutch
- 3 Combination (please elaborate):

## Rationale

**1. When (re)designing the course, does the principle of diversity-sensitive education play a role in your reflections?**

*What is meant by diversity-sensitive education? Read the description in the introduction!*

- 1 This consideration does not play a role in (re)designing the course
- 2 If there is an external reason that shows the importance of attention for diversity-sensitive education (a Director of Studies, colleague, student evaluation, developments in the field) I will consider it, but I do not think of it automatically
- 3 This is a leading consideration for (re)designing the course

Current situation:

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Desired situation:

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Elaborate your answer by comparing the current and desired situation.

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How important is it in your opinion to provide a course that is diversity sensitive? Why?

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*Looking for more information or examples?*

- Diversity policy documents of VU Amsterdam (only in Dutch): <http://www.vu.nl/nl/over-de-vu/profiel-en-missie/uitgelicht/diversiteit/index.aspx>
- *Geconcretiseerde Onderwijsvisie Know VU*: <https://knowvu.nl/home/ow-visie/>
- Educational strategy of your department (ask your Director of Studies)

## Learning goals

*Diversity-related learning goals are aimed at the development of what are called diversity competences: skills, knowledge, attitude and (self)reflection that students need to acquire for their future profession in a multicultural, diverse and globalized environment.*

**2. What role does this course fulfil in the realization of programme goals related to diversity competences ?**

***Ask your Director of Studies if you are not familiar with the programme goals.***

- 1 This course does not fulfil a role in the realization of programme goals related to diversity competences
- 2 It is not *formally* defined what role this course fulfils in the development and assessment of diversity competences but *in the actual practice* of the course the development of some of these goals is in fact stimulated
- 3 The role this course fulfils in the development and assessment of specific diversity aims of the programme is formally defined and communicated in the information for students and staff

Current situation:

\_\_\_\_\_

1

2

3

Desired situation:

\_\_\_\_\_

1

2

3

Elaborate your answer by comparing the current and desired situation.

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**3. How clearly defined are learning goals related to diversity competences in this course?**

- 1 No learning goals related to diversity competences are defined for this course
- 2 The course has some desirable learning goals related to diversity competences but these are not formally articulated in the course description (e.g. study guide)
- 3 The course has clearly defined learning goals related to diversity competences that are described in the course description (e.g. study guide)

Current situation:

\_\_\_\_\_

1

2

3

Desired situation:

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1

2

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Elaborate your answer by comparing the current and desired situation.

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In Table 1 below, describe the learning goals regarding diversity competences of the course in its current situation. Mention the goals that are formally described *as well as* the ones that are actually stimulated in the practice of the course but are not formally included in the course information (e.g. study guide).

Also mention the Dublin descriptor to which each learning goal refers: Knowledge and understanding (**K**), Application of knowledge (**A**), Academic Judgement (**J**), Communication (**C**) and/or Learning skills (**L**). *NB. This information is important for helping the scan coordinator to get an overview of the study programme as a whole. This overview will be discussed during the work session based on the findings of this tool.*

<b>Table 1 Learning aim related to diversity competences (current situation)</b>	<b>Formally included Y(es)/N(o)</b>	<b>Dublin descriptor (K, A, J, C, L)</b>

Next, describe your thoughts about the learning goals regarding diversity competences for the desired situation. *N.B. you can also do this during the work session where findings of this tool are discussed with colleagues.*

<b>Table 2 Learning goals related to diversity competences (desired situation)</b>	<b>To be formally included Y(es)/N(o)</b>	<b>Dublin descriptor (K, A, J, C, L)</b>

*Looking for ideas and examples of programme and learning goals for diversity competences?*

- Taxonomy of intercultural competences (Ridings, Simpson, Leask et al, 2008; see Fig 5.1 on p. 65 of the book *Internationalizing the Curriculum* by Betty Leask, 2015)
- Formulation of intended learning outcomes at course level: Chapter 6 of *Internationalizing the Curriculum* by Betty Leask, 2015.
- Diversity aims at institutional or programme level: Chapter 5 of *Internationalizing the Curriculum* by Betty Leask, 2015.
- Examples from scans of VU project
- [-Quick guide to Curriculum design](http://www.ieaa.org.au/resources/learning-teaching-across-cultures), Teaching and learning across cultures [www.ieaa.org.au/resources/learning-teaching-across-cultures]

## Assessment tasks

**4. To what extent do assessment tasks require students to consider diversity issues relevant to the topics of the course?**

- 1 Students in this course are never required to consider diversity issues as part of an assessment task
- 2 Students are sometimes given the option in this course to discuss diversity issues as part of an assessment task
- 3 Students in this course are required to discuss diversity issues as part of an assessment task

Current situation:

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Desired situation:

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Elaborate your answer by comparing the current and desired situation.

Also specify – if applicable – the assessment tasks related to diversity that students have to carry out in the current situation of this course and whether these concern theoretical, empirical or practical (e.g. cases from professional practice) issues

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## Content of the course

*When considering content you should think not only about the topics covered in text books and readings but also about the information contained in your lecture slides and notes, information booklets, etc.*

**6. To what extent is knowledge of diversity themes addressed in (the different topics of) the course?**

- 1 In this course, no attention is paid to diversity themes
- 2 In this course, students get the option to engage with diversity themes
- 3 (Some parts of) the course require(s) students to engage with diversity themes

Current situation:

\_\_\_\_\_

1

2

3

Desired situation:

\_\_\_\_\_

1

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Describe – if applicable – for the current situation, the diversity theme(s) and related teaching materials that are addressed in this course. Specify whether they concern theoretical, empirical or practical (e.g. cases from professional practice) issues.

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Then, elaborate your answer to this question by comparing the current and desired situation.

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**7. To what extent do the selected content and teaching materials of this course expose students to multiple perspectives and alternative views on the course topics?**

- 1 The content and teaching materials do not expose students to multiple perspectives and alternative views on the course topics
- 2 In some parts of the course, students are given the option to consider multiple perspectives and alternative views on the course topics
- 3 In some parts of the course, students are required to consider the topics from different perspectives or views

Current situation:

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Desired situation:

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Elaborate your answer by describing and comparing the current and desired situation.

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**8. Are cases, examples and illustrations that are used and discussed in this course representative of the diversity within the field?**

*For example, using international settings as example, using cases that show different people/situations, showing examples from different contexts, etc.*

- 1 Cases, examples, illustrations do not refer to contexts characterized by diversity
- 2 Cases, examples, illustrations are from diverse contexts and provide opportunities for students to engage with multiple perspectives but it is up to them whether or not they take these up
- 3 Cases, examples, illustrations etc. from diverse contexts are included and students are specifically encouraged to engage with multiple perspectives and points of view

Current situation:

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Desired situation:

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Elaborate your answer by describing and comparing the current and desired situation.

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*Looking for ideas about including diversity themes in the content of the course?*

- 'Meetladder Diversiteit Onderwijs' by Pels et al. (2012), p. 12 and 13 (N.B. specifically for social fields of study). [www.verwey-jonker.nl/doc/jeugd/Meetladder-Diversiteit-Onderwijs\\_2934\\_web.pdf](http://www.verwey-jonker.nl/doc/jeugd/Meetladder-Diversiteit-Onderwijs_2934_web.pdf)
- Examples of revised programmes/courses:
  - <http://transnationalteachingteams.org/cases.html>
  - Reports on diversity scans at VU Amsterdam [link to future website DSVU]
- A quick guide to curriculum design in 'Learning and teaching across cultures', Leask and Carroll (2013). <http://www.ieaa.org.au/resources/learning-teaching-across-cultures> (N.B. programme level)
- Page 13 and 14 of the Checklist Programme Internationalization by Reeb-Gruber (2009), INHolland University (N.B. programme level)
- Chapter 3 'A conceptual framework for internationalization of the curriculum' from Internationalizing the curriculum by Leask (2015). (N.B. programme level).

## Teaching and learning arrangements

When considering teaching and learning arrangements you should consider all types of activities in the course that are intended to support the learning of students, such as attending lectures, studying literature, making all kinds of assignments (individually or in groups).

**9. To what extent do the teaching and learning arrangements assist students to develop the intended learning goals of the course regarding diversity competences?**

- 1 The teaching and learning arrangements do *not* include activities that are specifically designed to assist students to develop learning goals related to diversity competences
- 2 The teaching and learning arrangements include *some activities* that are specifically designed to assist students to develop learning goals related to diversity competences
- 3 The teaching and learning arrangements include *a range of activities* that are specifically designed to assist students to develop learning goals related to diversity competences

Current situation:

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Desired situation:

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_

If applicable, describe the teaching and learning arrangements that aim to stimulate diversity competences and reflect on their effectivity. Do students actually learn what you expect them to learn?

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Do students receive feedback on the development of their diversity competences?

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*Looking for ideas and examples?*

- A quick guide to managing group work of 'Learning and teaching across cultures' by Leask & Carroll (2013). <http://www.ieaa.org.au/resources/learning-teaching-across-cultures>
- Chapter 7 'Using student diversity' in Internationalizing the Curriculum by Leask (2015).

## Inclusive Education

*Inclusive education is characterized by providing optimal support for the development of the full potential of all students, regardless of their background and personal characteristics. The diversity of the student group is perceived and used as a valuable resource for teaching and learning. Inclusive education results in a diversity-sensitive learning environment in which all students feel confident and unthreatened to learn and to develop themselves.*

**11. When (re)designing or preparing your teaching for this course, do you take the diversity sensitivity of teaching materials and activities into account?**

***This also means that you are aware of the possibility that material or activities may lead to (students experiencing) stereotyping, stigmatization, polarization and micro-aggressions and that you actively prevent these from occurring.***

- 1 This consideration does not play a role for me
- 2 If there is an external reason (student feedback, a Director of Studies, experiences of colleagues, developments in the field) that shows the need for more diversity sensitivity I will reconsider the course, but I do not think of this issue automatically
- 3 This is one of the main considerations when I (re)design or prepare my teaching for this course

Current situation:

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Desired situation:

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Elaborate your answer by describing and comparing the current and desired situation. Also pay attention to the effects that your considerations about diversity sensitive teaching (may) have on the way students experience (parts of) this course.

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**12. To what extent do you value students' feedback on the diversity sensitivity of the course and take signs of inconveniences or problems of students related to diversity issues seriously?**

- 1 I do not consider the students' perception of the diversity sensitivity as a relevant aspect of the evaluation of this course
- 2 When students have a complaint about the diversity sensitivity of this course, I will try to solve it, but I do not proactively gather information about this aspect
- 3 I proactively gather information about students' perceptions of the diversity sensitivity of this course

Current situation:

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Desired situation:

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Elaborate your answer by describing and comparing the current and desired situation:

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*Looking for more information on inclusive education?*

- A guide to internationalization of the curriculum and inclusive teaching in transnational education by Transnational Teaching Teams:  
[http://transnationalteachingteams.org/restoolkit\\_1.html](http://transnationalteachingteams.org/restoolkit_1.html)
- Quick guide to managing group work of Learning and teaching across cultures.  
<http://www.ieaa.org.au/resources/learning-teaching-across-cultures>
- Checklist Programme Internationalization by Reeb-Gruber (2009), INHolland University, p. 15
- Creating inclusive college classrooms by Saunders and Kardia (2010).  
[http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/p3\\_1](http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/p3_1)
- 'Promising practices' for inclusive teaching and learning. Via:  
<http://www.ioc.global/resources.html>
- *Meetladder Diversiteit Onderwijs* by Pels et al. (2012), p. 14-17.
- Student feedback on inclusive education: examples of topic lists for students' perspectives [link to future website DSVU]

## Overall evaluation

1. What are the most important insights this tool has brought you in relation to the course you are coordinating? What are your ideas about improvements for the course?

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2. Considering your own competences as a designer, coordinator and/or teacher of this course, how do you evaluate your own capacities to design and teach a diversity-sensitive course? What aspects do you need to develop further? What kind of support do you need for your further professional development in this field?

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