

# MICROAGGRESSIONS

## CREATING AN ENGAGING & INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT



### WHAT IS IT?



Microaggressions are defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative...slights...” (Sue et al., 2007)<sup>1</sup>

They are often unintentional or automatic, and come from well-meaning people. It is, however, more important to consider the way a person legitimately experiences a microaggression than it is to consider the intent behind the sentiment, as this may contribute to a person feeling as though they do not belong.

### RESEARCH...



Over time, microaggressions can inhibit the academic performance of students as they experience increased feelings of discomfort, self-doubt, isolation, and emotional exhaustion (Solorzano et al., 2000); undue stress and feelings of exclusion (Yosso et al., 2009); hopelessness and even post-traumatic stress disorder (Nadal et al., 2011).

### DATA ...



**55%** of UCD students agree (or strongly agree) that they feel they belong at this university

**56%** of UCD students agree (or strongly agree) that faculty are generally committed to promoting respect for and understanding of group differences at school (UCUES, 2018)

### TEACHING STRATEGIES...



- To prevent, **use microaffirmations**, or small acts that **foster inclusion**. These include listening, comforting, and supporting people who may feel isolated or invisible in an environment.
- **Address the comment**, even if you feel uncomfortable, because not doing so will send the message that such comments are okay.
- **Actively facilitate** the discussion, rather than passively participating. This **helps prevent** only dominant voices from taking over the discussion.
- **Validate the feelings** of your **students** about issues of difference and power. They are trusting you when they share their feelings.
- Consider **sharing** the ways which you have been conditioned by the circumstances of your life and society, even if they seem to be “flawed.” This **communicates courage** in approaching conversations about difference.

### STUDENTS SAY...



“I feel valued in classes where professors welcome me and make an effort to use my correct name, even when it is hard to pronounce.”

“I like when an instructor creates a space where gender pronouns are communicated from the first day of class.”

### REFLECTION...



- How can you recognize when these occur: ascription of intelligence based on race or gender?; assumption of criminality or danger?
- How can you prevent “othering” cultural values and communication styles, which indicates that dominant values are “normal” or ideal?

<sup>1</sup>List of all references in the complete JITT Guide.

