

Gender and the Law Prof Blog

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Reflections on "What Inclusive Instructors Do"

By Jamie Abrams

As we prepare to return to the classroom in Fall 2021, I offer a short reflection after reading the book *What Inclusive Instructors Do* by Tracie Marcella Addy, Derek Dube, Khadijah A. Mitchell, and Mallory E. SoRelle (2021). This book is a great read to re-ignite Fall class preparation after many months of fatigue and burnout from the challenges of COVID transitions. This book compiles faculty interviews describing both *what* inclusive teaching is and *how* to achieve it. It teaches us that inclusive teaching is something that can be learned, cultivated, and measured.

The book gives two simple messages defining inclusive teaching – inclusive teaching is equitable and it is welcoming. Inclusive teachers are accountable for the learning environments they cultivate. They learn about their students. They care for the student's well-being. They adapt to feedback about their classroom environment. Inclusive institutions and classrooms cannot be achieved by diversity professional alone, by hired speakers, or by robust elective courses. Rather, inclusive classrooms are contextually situated in an environment within a larger institution. Those larger environments have their own hierarchies, biases, and entrenched power structures that need to be contested.

The book's lessons are powerful for law faculty as law teaching strikes me as acutely plagued by a deep reverence to preserving the status quo by recreating how we were taught. This book is a great springboard for organizing learning circles, hosting faculty workshops, and developing best practices institutionally. It would be great to see these themes carried into law with a conference or book volume compiling applications of inclusive teaching methodologies and techniques in law schools.

Far too often law schools expect isolated classes, faculty, and student groups to lead the way on diversity, equity, and inclusion. The book's message is unequivocal that "inclusive teaching is the collective responsibility of all those members of the institutions who contribute to the institutional mission around teaching and learning." This is an important area of reflection for law schools. Many existing approaches to equity and inclusion seek to achieve bold goals with incremental approaches and siloed accountability. Law schools tend to segment diversity and inclusion with student services, admissions, and dedicated staff, leaving the full faculty generally immunized from accountability for building an equitable and inclusive institution. This segmentation is misaligned with student experiences and ignores the longstanding calls for systemic reform to the architectural core of legal education.

This book is a powerful call to action. It left me energized with new ideas and empowered to teach with a bolder vision for cultivating an inclusive learning environment.

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