

# Best Practices for DE&I in Asynchronous Online Instruction

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## Introduction

The purpose of this inquiry was to develop a list of best practices for infusing an asynchronous online university course with enhanced diversity, equity, and inclusiveness, including course design and course content. The results of the inquiry will spark changes in CSUSB's MUS 1800 *Music Appreciation*, an asynchronous online course serving 250 General Education students each semester. Ideally those changes will result in the addition of a Diversity and Inclusiveness (DI) designation for the course.

## Related Literature

A search of related literature yielded no useful information specific to music instruction. However, the search did produce relevant recommendations for asynchronous online instruction, and even more for online instruction in general. Many practices mentioned in relation to synchronous online instruction apply just as well to asynchronous teaching.

Two prominent examples of educational research stood out, though they were not the only ideas from which best practices could be derived. The first was Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The UDL framework developed over 30 years and became an important component of public policy beginning with a definition and endorsement of it in the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (CAST, 2021). Two main principles, multiple means of "action and expression" and multiple means of "representation," address the goal of inclusiveness (Houston, 2018). Action and expression refer to learning methodologies and activities, and representation refers to formats for or types of assessment.

The second area of research centered on learning as a social activity. The concepts of social inclusion (Hymel & Katz, 2019) and social learning theory (McLeod, 2016) suggest important aids to fostering diversity in instructional settings. The idea that learning is in part a social activity presents a particular challenge for asynchronous instruction.

## Results

Having to deliver meaningful music instruction to a hearing-impaired student is a scary prospect. This author has not had that experience in MUS 1800, but a truly inclusive course would accommodate the possibility. A major revision of MUS 1800 planned for Summer 2021 includes an overhaul of a number of instructor-composed musical examples. Those examples currently provide just an audio track and written description of musical traits, but the revision will add an overlay of additional audio and also visual cues. That presents an opportunity to add additional "means of expression," not only better accommodating visual learners, but also students with both hearing and visual disabilities.

In an effort to both provide additional learning modalities, and increase social learning opportunities, this author added several small-scale group activities and two synchronous lectures as part of a Fall 2020 adaptation of MUS 1800 to a semester curriculum. Another instructional area ripe for exploitation is "office hours" (Gibbons-Kunka, 2020). For Spring 2021, this author increased attendance slightly for weekly office hours by dedicating particular days and times for help with current assignments and sending students several corresponding notices and reminders.

The final goal of this inquiry was the development of course content sufficient to earn a CSUSB Diversity and Inclusiveness designation (DI). For that, a course must "comprehensively explore multiple perspectives in order to develop student understanding to collaborate respectfully and effectively across a variety of cultures and contexts" (CSUSB 2021-22 Academic Catalog, 2021). MUS 1800 already includes materials drawn from many global musical traditions, and it includes a scaffolded writing assignment in which students analyze artistic content and related extra-musical context for a specific, non-Western musical example. The addition of another step in the assignment – a comparison of the original example with an artist or genre of a student's choice – should satisfy the DI expectation of a "comprehensive" exploration of multiple musical perspectives.

## References

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