

# BEST PRACTICES ON GENDER INCLUSIVITY



RISE WITH IE WOMEN



IE University is committed to fostering gender diversity and equality, which is a critical component of the transversal effort to implement the United Nations' 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. The following guide offers IE University faculty and staff some suggestions for best practices that will contribute to making IE a more gender-inclusive space.

## 1. MENTAL PREPARATION

- **Be “goodish”:** Gender equity and inclusion in the workplace deserve our attention. That being said, aspiring to perfection is impossible, given that gender issues are also constantly changing. It is recommended, then, to cultivate a mindset that is adaptable and kind toward others. Just as critical is extending that kindness to yourself. Make an earnest effort to adopt best practices, but be prepared to make blunders, come into conflict, and feel frustrated. All of that is inherent to diverse and complex social settings, which means that it is all the more important to navigate these waters assuming that others have good intentions and expecting others to think the same of you.
- **Review and research:** Regularly review IE University's policies and practices regarding diversity, equity, and belonging. One should also make an effort to go beyond that and try to keep up with some of the research on gender and inclusion in universities and workplaces (IE Women & Allies is a good place to start). Doing so helps ease the burden of impacted groups in having to raise awareness and allows you to be an informed ally. Here it is worth considering the words of the Black feminist Audre Lorde:

Women are expected to educate men. Lesbians and gay men are expected to educate the heterosexual world. The oppressors maintain their position and evade their responsibility for their own actions. There is a constant drain of energy which might be better used in redefining ourselves and devising realistic scenarios for altering the present and constructing the future.<sup>1</sup>

- **Don't generalize:** Building on Lorde's previous quote, keep in mind that while women share certain experiences and challenges, these are certainly not homogeneous. Be attentive to intersectionality—overlapping factors such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, age that also shape each individual woman's experience.

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<sup>1</sup> Audre Lorde, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg: Crossing Press, 1984).

## 2. CLASSROOM PRACTICES

- **Be deliberate about representation:** Avoid content that reinforces gender stereotypes. For instance, an image of a boardroom that features only men at the table can reinforce the idea that men are more apt to take up C-suite positions. Relatedly, when assigning readings, consider whether you can assign a comparable text written by a woman. The Erasmus+ Programme's "[Women's Legacy Project](#)" or Harvard Business Publishing's "[Glass-Shattering Leaders: Change Agents for Gender Equity](#)" and "[Course Materials to Discuss Gender Equity in Business](#)" offer some useful resources.
- **Acknowledge and critically interrogate:** That being said, gender inequality has historically been present and continues to be an issue in various forms. Rather than gloss over it, it is important to recognize that fact and encourage students to critically interrogate its causes and effects. Gender inequality can only be addressed if we take a hard look at the problem (for instance, this can take the form of dedicated lessons on gender-related topics).
- **Use language with care:** Strive for gender-neutral language, which is easy in English—IE University's main language of instruction. The singular "they" is perfectly acceptable and can be a useful tool when discussing abstract examples. It is also recommended to reach out to students and solicit what pronouns they use. Another way to signal inclusivity and make students comfortable is by introducing yourself with your own pronouns.
- **Foster an inclusive environment:** Pay attention to class discussion. Are some students more comfortable talking than others? Is the space as inclusive for women as it is for men? Here are some strategies to consider:
  - **Encourage students to play an active role.** Engage students in a conversation about what should be the best practices guiding their classroom community. For instance, coming up with a collaborative "social contract" during the first class allows students to act as autonomous agents who play a role in creating an inclusive classroom. The social contract can then foster an ethics of responsibility and accountability throughout the semester.
  - **Create spaces that reward vulnerability rather than competition.** Instead of prompting students for "right answers," encourage them to dwell in questions. Acknowledge your own limitations and make clear that ignorance is not only okay but necessary in the process of knowledge production.
  - **Incorporate a diverse toolbox to encourage and evaluate student participation.** For instance, "warm calling" (discussing with a student in advance that you will call them out in class) can help students with social anxiety, while reading responses and journals can also be used to evaluate student engagement.
  - **Be tolerant with bathroom breaks and medical requests.** Menstruating students should have autonomous access to a bathroom. Relatedly, incapacitating periods should be considered legitimate medical excuses for class absences or extended deadlines. It is worth noting that according to Spanish legislation, women faculty and staff have a right to sick leave if suffering from incapacitating periods.

- **Signal inclusivity:** Even if not necessarily related to class, mentioning events that address gender issues signals to students that these are important matters that you care about. [IE Women & Allies](#) maintains a calendar of events on campus, in addition to a WhatsApp group that you can join to stay up to date.

### 3. ADMINISTRATIVE AND COMMUNICATIVE PRACTICES

- **Be attentive to bias in grading:** Compare and contrast the average grade you assign to students. Are women students getting lower or higher grades than male students? Might that have something to do with your own biases (for instance, having higher expectations for one gender over the other)? If possible, practice blind grading.
- **Characterize your students carefully:** When writing letters of recommendation, be attentive to gender bias. Research indicates that faculty usually write stronger letters of recommendation for men. For instance, women are more likely to be praised with “grindstone” words that signal effort (“hardworking,” “dependable,” etc.) and communal adjectives like “nurturing” than men, who are more likely to be praised with words that signal ability (“talented,” “brilliant,” etc.) and agentic adjectives like “ambitious.”<sup>2</sup>
- **Consider the social role of titles:** Some faculty choose to drop their titles to foster a more informal relationship with students. While this is an individual decision, it is worth considering who can afford to do so. Women are far more likely to be involuntarily “untitled” (being called Ms., Mrs., or by their first name instead of Dr. or Professor) than men. This manifestation of what Deborah Cameron has identified as “the gender respect gap” is an issue because by and large women need to work harder than men to establish authority and credibility, and titles can help with that.<sup>3</sup> While a man who allows students to call him by his first name might come off as “cool,” a woman who requires students to refer to her by her title might come off as “fussy.”
- **Share the burden of committee work:** Academia is not immune from inequalities stemming from the historical legacy of the so-called gender division of labor. Research indicates that women are more likely to be burdened with the responsibilities of administrative and committee work—“service work” that is usually valued less when it comes to performance review and promotion.<sup>4</sup> Efforts should be made to recognize the value of “academic housekeeping,” render visible the labor of women, and encourage men to take on their fair share of this labor as well.

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<sup>2</sup> Markus Eberhardt, Giovanni Facchini, and Valeria Rueda, “Gender Differences in Reference Letters: Evidence from the Economics Job Market,” IZA Discussion Paper No. 15055 (2022). <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4114599>.

<sup>3</sup> Deborah Cameron, “The Gender Respect Gap,” in *Innovations and Challenges: Women, Language, and Sexism*, ed. Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard (New York: Routledge, 2020). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429026140-3>.

<sup>4</sup> Linda Babcock, Maria P. Recalde, Lise Vesterlund, and Laurie Weingart, “Gender Differences in Accepting and Receiving Requests for Tasks with Low Promotability,” *American Economic Review* 107, no. 3 (2017): 714–747. <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20141734>.



## 4. BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

- **Be aware of the context:** Consider how you socialize with students. If you find yourself surrounded by male colleagues or students chatting informally about UFC or the attractiveness of Hollywood celebrities, consider whether that kind of sociability is inclusive of women in the workplace. Be professional in your relationships with students. Needless to say, sexist and derogatory language also has no place at IE University, unless it is being carefully and thoughtfully interrogated in a classroom setting.
- **Students have eyes and ears:** Avoid complaining and making generalizations about students when socializing with colleagues on the campuses or their surroundings. IE University is a small community, and it is not uncommon to run into students in Segovia and Madrid. Although what you do outside of the workplace and work hours is your own business, it is worth considering how students might interpret your words and actions and how that then might shape their experience at the university.
- **Be an ally:** Familiarize yourself with the resources made available to women students, faculty, and staff at IE University and in Madrid/Segovia, so that if someone comes to you with an issue you can orient on where to seek the best assistance. It is also important to practice active bystander intervention whenever you witness any kind of discriminatory, harassing, or violent behavior based on sex or gender.<sup>5</sup> Familiarize yourself with IE University's "[Code for the Prevention of Harassment in the Workplace](#)". When intervening, practice the ABC:
  - **Assess for safety.** Before intervening, ensure your own personal safety and evaluate whether it is necessary to call the authorities.
  - **Be in a group.** Besides being safer, a group intervention is likely to be more successful than an individual one.
  - **Care for the victim.** Talk to the victim to see if they are OK or may require some kind of medical care. Offer help in case they seek to report the incident to authorities ([information regarding the procedure](#)). Stay with them until someone they trust arrives.
- **Sexual- and Gender-Based Violence:** For information on what to do and how to help in cases involving sexual assault and gender-based violence (which may involve police authorities) please refer to the [following resource](#).

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<sup>5</sup>IE University defines sexual harassment as "a) Behavior of a sexual nature or with sexual connotations. b) Unwelcomed by the affected person. c) Takes place within the work environment. d) Includes verbal, written, or gestural actions or physical contact." Sexist harassment is defined as "a) Conduct conditioned by a person's sex or sexuality. b) Conduct that infringes upon a person's dignity and/or gives rise to an environment of intimidation, degradation or offence." IE University, "[Code for the Prevention of Harassment in the Workplace](https://docs.ie.edu/sustainability/resources/Code-for-the-Prevention-of-Harassment.pdf)." <https://docs.ie.edu/sustainability/resources/Code-for-the-Prevention-of-Harassment.pdf>.



## 5. RESEARCH PRACTICES

- **The Matilda Effect:** There is a long history of women researchers across all academic fields having their work overlooked, denied credit, and sometimes even coopted—a phenomenon that the historian of science Margaret W. Rossiter termed the “Matilda Effect” (named after the nineteenth-century suffragist and abolitionist Matilda Joslyn Gage who in 1883 published an essay titled “Woman as Inventor”).<sup>6</sup> You might consider some strategies to avoid reproducing these structural inequities, such as:
  - **“Citational justice.”** As indicated by Nature, there is a growing body of evidence that men benefit from higher citation rates in fields ranging from economics to neuroscience.<sup>7</sup> Knowledge production is shaped by a long history of inequities (including gender), and that is reflected in footnotes and bibliographies. When publishing a paper, take some time to critically examine your own bibliography.
  - **Diversify collaborative networks.** Collaborative research is difficult and time-consuming, so it can be tempting to rely on familiar networks. But familiar networks can also reproduce the structural inequities embedded in academia. As such, consider reaching out to women scholars in your field.
  - **Consider who is the public face of the research.** Teams often get media requests regarding their research. Encouraging women to take on these public-facing roles helps distribute credit and contributes to the representation of women in academia (one important caveat is to not require women to take on these roles—especially if it becomes an additional burden that impacts their ability to fulfill more critical tenure requirements). Similarly, departments and institutes should consider ways to spotlight women faculty’s research.

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<sup>6</sup>Margaret W. Rossiter, “The Matthew/Matilda Effect in Science,” *Social Studies of Science* 23, no. 2 (1993): 325-341. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030631293023002004>.

<sup>7</sup> Diana Kwon, “The Rise of Citational Justice: How Scholars Are Making References Fairer,” *Nature* 603 (2022): 568-571. <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-022-00793-1>.

# Rise

