

Diversity Training Module for Graduate Student TAs

HHMI-MIT Drennan Education Laboratory: Professor Cathy Drennan, cdrennan@mit.edu;
Beth Taylor, evogel@mit.edu; Anique Olivier-Mason, aniqueom@mit.edu

Social psychologists use the term *stereotype threat* to describe **the debilitating fear of confirming a negative stereotype**, and extensive studies show that the perception of being judged unfairly leads to underperformance and, in the case of science, the loss of strong students from a course or a major. **Anyone can experience stereotype threat**, and students who care the most about succeeding (such as MIT students!) are most susceptible. Paradoxically, giving undeserved praise or refraining from critiques can be extremely damaging to students experiencing stereotype threat, unintentionally implying that a student's mediocre performance is the most you expect.

We have developed and assessed a diversity module for graduate student teaching assistants to train them to identify and address diversity issues in their recitations.

The training works well for both small and large groups. Either (1) participants complete a reading, "But I Don't Like Beer: A Guide to Identifying and Reducing Stereotype Threat", and then participate in a facilitated discussion on that reading in small groups; or (2) participants attend a 90-minute interactive seminar with PowerPoint slides covering the material and leading the group through discussion questions in pairs / small groups and with the larger group.

Since 2010, over 135 chemistry graduate TAs have been trained. Assessment of the training was carried out in collaboration with Dr. Rudy Mitchell in the MIT Teaching and Learning Laboratory.

TAs reported outstanding gains in their sensitivity to diversity issues and their confidence in addressing diversity-related problems following the training. Pre- and post-training means for diversity confidence and sensitivity questions are provided below for 2010-2012 participants.

	% agree		Mean	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Diversity confidence and sensitivity items (N = 120)			4.21	5.84
a. (I have confidence in) understanding diversity issues in the classroom	40%	93%	4.21	5.93
b. I am familiar with strategies to alleviate diversity issues in the classroom.	26%	89%	3.61	5.53
c. I can define stereotype threat.	27%	93%	3.43	6.10
d. I can recognize stereotype threat.	28%	96%	3.46	5.94
e. In addition to my teaching, I can apply diversity training to other aspects of my life.	58%	87%	4.87	5.90
f. It is important to address diversity issues that might surface in my recitation.	60%	91%	4.79	5.88
g. I believe to be an effective teacher, a TA must understand how diversity issues can affect learning.	57%	90%	4.78	5.95
h. I can send a negative message to some of my students by ignoring diversity issues.	48%	78%	4.54	5.64

Students used a seven-point Likert scale to indicate their level of agreement with each statement: 1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neutral, and 7 = strongly agree. Bolded mean values are for the summative scale (N = 120, $p = 0.000$).