

**CATL DIVERSITY & INCLUSION GRANT 2021-22**  
**APPLYING DEI LEARNING OBJECTIVES**  
**IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS COURSES**

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## **Background**

In the 2020-21 academic year, the Strategic Communications department updated student learning objectives in all its required courses to meet new DEI standards from its accrediting body. The diversity standard for the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications states:

*“The unit’s curriculum creates culturally proficient communicators capable of learning with, working on and advancing the value of diverse teams. The unit’s curriculum includes instruction on issues and perspectives relating to mass communications across diverse cultures in a global society.”*

The newly created DEI learning objectives were specific to each course and incorporated into syllabi beginning in the fall of 2021. The purpose of this DIG project was to develop teaching modules that could be used by any STC faculty to apply the new learning objectives in Strategic Communications courses.

## **Project Overview**

In the summer of 2021, we developed three teaching modules. A fourth was developed in the spring of 2021. The modules were developed for the following courses:

- STC 2520: Public Relations & Civic Responsibility
- STC 3120: Strategic Writing
- STC 3620: Strategic Research Methods
- STC 4520: Strategic Campaigns

These four courses are the primary courses in the major taught by STC faculty (as opposed to required courses taught by multiple School of Communications faculty). Each module included:

- One foundational reading and one video to introduce the topic in the course
- A PowerPoint with an initial lesson about the topic at hand
- A list of references that professors could use a) to assign readings to students during the semester, b) to learn more about these topics themselves as teachers, and c) to incorporate this knowledge in their lectures during the semester

- A “hands-on” / application activity where students apply the concepts learned to a real-world situation in the strategic communications industry. This activity would come with a short lesson plan.

Materials were tested in classes in the fall and spring, and adjustments were made to the modules based on student feedback and faculty reflection.

### **Assessment Plan**

Three of the modules were tested in classes in the fall (one PR & Civic Responsibility class, two Research Methods classes, and one Strategic Campaigns class) and the PR module was tested again in the spring. The fourth module (Strategic Writing) is ready to use but has not yet been tested. The three other modules were assessed in four ways:

- A qualitative Qualtrics survey given to students after they had read the materials and seen the presentations
- Results of quiz questions on the material in two courses
- Instructor reflections on what worked/didn't work well in each class
- Review of reading reflections submitted by students

The Qualtrics survey was given 1-2 weeks after module presentations and included the following four questions:

- 1) What did you like/appreciate about the class session on DEI?
- 2) What would you say are the two most important things you learned?
- 3) Was there anything missing from the session that you think is important to add or include? What would that be?
- 4) In what ways might you apply the knowledge or concepts from the DEI session in the future (in this class, future classes, or your internships or career)?

Quizzes included questions on DEI terms, diversity in the industry, specific theories presented in the modules, and the proper way to apply diversity in conducting research.

Instructor reflection included notes on what worked well and what didn't in presenting the modules, the readings, and the activities; student discussions and specific questions raised when presenting the modules; timing of the modules and alignment with other class content/activities; and reflections on the identity of the instructor when presenting materials.

### **Key Learnings from Assessment**

*Qualtrics Survey:*

Below are some topline themes from the Qualtrics survey:

- Students appreciated hearing about DEI specifically in relation to the communications industry. For many, this is the first time they had heard a DEI lecture or thought about these issues as it applies to their major. Many were surprised at the lack of diversity in the industry. Students also felt it was important to discuss DEI as an integral part of the curriculum and, *“NOT as if this is something extra considered above and beyond in the comm world.”*
- Examples were helpful to students to envision how DEI can be applied in the field or to their own work in the class. When asked about what was missing from the presentations, students reiterated that more examples would be helpful. Students specifically wanted more examples of how they can apply DEI in the workplace. This was reiterated in student discussions during the presentations where students asked questions about how to deal with a supervisor who does not promote DEI.
- In the presentation from Professor Bravo, students stated how much they appreciated the personal examples from the instructor’s own lived experiences. For example, one student said, *“I appreciated hearing about DEI from the perspective of a Costa Rican. It made the topic a lot more real and pressing coming from her own personal struggles.”*
- This was the first time many students had learned the definitions to the terms: diversity, equity, and inclusion. Several students repeated those definitions in their responses.
- In stating what they learned from the modules, students often reiterated specific theories or concepts from the presentations, showing that they were retaining the content.
- When asked about how they would apply this information in the future, it was interesting that students in the introductory PR course used terms such as *“understanding,” “keeping in mind,”* and *“being aware,”* while students in the upper-level courses were more likely to use terms like *“personal responsibility”* or discuss how they could specifically apply the content to their projects and future workplaces. This aligns with the content in the lower-level course introducing students to DEI in the industry, while the upper-level courses were more about applying DEI specifically to Research and Campaigns. This will be helpful to us as we think about how to scaffold the DEI modules for all our courses.

#### *Quiz Results and Reading Reflections:*

Quiz questions relating to the content were included in the Strategic Research Methods and PR classes. In the Strategic Research class, 88 to 100% of students responded correctly. In the PR class, 76% to 88% of students responded correctly.

In the Campaigns class, students wrote reflections on what they learned from the DEI readings. Students appreciated that the readings came from diverse sources and that they could apply the concepts to their campaigns. On one reading outlining the power of communicators to shape public perceptions of BIPOC individuals, a student wrote, *“This article was incredible and so important for anyone in the communications industry to read. It can be easy to get caught up in the strategy or creativity of a campaign and forget the implications of being able to reach so many people with our ideas and portrayals of others.”* Another student wrote, *“The addition*

of questions throughout the campaign planning process, rather than the all too common, ineffective act of just a final DEI review, illustrates how integrating DEI . . . is an aid to reach more audiences, more effectively, and think more authentically.”

### *Instructor Reflections:*

- *Customization and Application:* Adding or adjusting content to align with a specific assignment, project, or client helps students apply the modules to their work. For example, during the presentation, a Campaigns instructor showed an old commercial from the brand students were working on and this sparked discussion about DEI challenges specific to their client. In a Strategic Research Class, in addition to learning how to develop a culturally sensitive research project outlined in the module, students then applied that learning to a qualitative project where they conducted focus groups with Black women. It’s important to refer to the modules throughout the semester and develop assignments where students can apply what they learned to their class projects.
- *More practical examples are needed:* While the DEI modules deliver a 30,000 ft. view, it’s helpful to provide further examples of how these concepts are applied in the field.
- *Reinforcing the message from industry professionals:* The day after the module was presented in a PR class, a DEI professional from a public affairs agency spoke to the class on how her agency applies DEI in their organization. This reinforced that it’s not just the instructors saying it’s important – our industry thinks it’s important.
- *Lived experiences of the instructor:* One of the instructors is an immigrant to the U.S. from Costa Rica. Thus, it was helpful for her to share her own lived experiences with students. Not every faculty member will be able to do so. However, because these personal reflections resonated with students, we need to think about how we can further bring these experiences into the classroom.
- *Scaffolding:* since this was the first time many students had been introduced to DEI in our industry, each module needed to explain the definitions of diversity, equity, and inclusion. In the future, we need to determine how to scaffold modules so that the upper-level courses are building on what was learned in the first- and second-year courses.

### **Conclusion and Sharing:**

After our assessment, several revisions to each of the modules were made and are posted to the department’s Moodle site. We will also be presenting the modules and the assessment to faculty in more detail at an information session in May.

This project has given us ways to incorporate the department’s new DEI learning objectives into the STC curriculum consistently and effectively. Doing this work up front allows other STC professors to use these modules as a base and build on them with their own examples, applications, and assignments. The assessment has also informed us where there are gaps and how we can fill those gaps in the future. For example, students clearly desire strategies for

personally enacting DEI in the workplace. These strategies could be taught in the School of Communications new Inclusive Communications Leadership course. In addition, as we are currently revising our STC curriculum, this information helps us understand where and how to infuse DEI into our new curriculum.