

# Course Glossary

This document provides definitions for terms students are likely to come across during this course. If there is a term that you think should be in this glossary but is not, please leave a comment on this sentence and we will add that term as soon as possible.

**The definitions in this document are categorized in the following way (and alphabetized within categories):**

- High-level concepts [[quick link](#)]
- Identity [[quick link](#)]
- Gender and sexual orientation [[quick link](#)]
- Interpersonal Interactions [[quick link](#)]
- Mechanisms of harm [[quick link](#)]

## High-level concepts

**Accessibility** is when a person with a disability is afforded the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as a person without a disability in an equally effective and equally integrated manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use. [[Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education](#)]

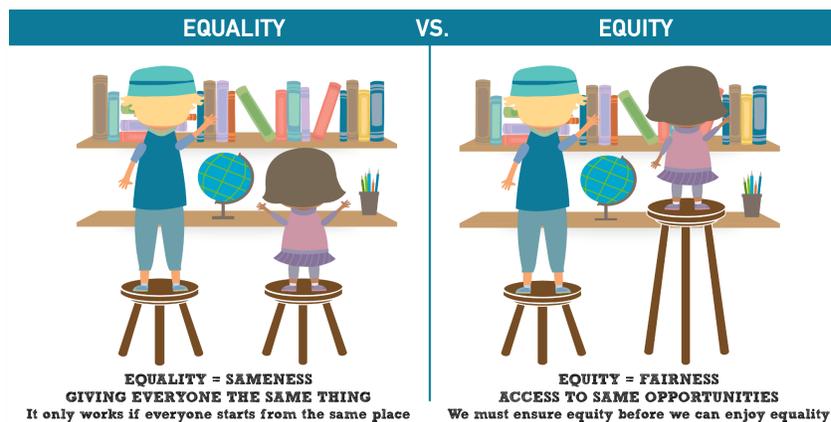
**Culture** can be defined as the *beliefs* that people hold about reality, the *norms* that guide their behavior, the *values* that orient their moral commitments, or the *symbols* through which these beliefs, norms, and values are communicated. [[oxford bibliography](#) - italicizing is ours]

**Diversity** refers to the fact that there are many different kinds of people, and these differences drive cultural, economic, and social vitality and innovation (Paraphrased from [Berkeley greater good](#)).

**Equity** is the concept of “[ensuring] fair treatment, equality of opportunity, and fairness in access to information and resources for all.” [Ford Foundation]

*Note:* Equity is distinguished from equality: Whereas equality means providing the *same to all*, equity means recognizing that we do not all start from the same place and must acknowledge and make adjustments to imbalances. [[naceweb.org](#) - italics are ours]

*Example:* The classic example of equity is best understood with a visual:



[[Smart Reading](#)]

**Inclusivity** is a philosophy of acceptance where all people are valued and treated with respect [Carrington 2000].

*Example:* An organization might work to foster inclusivity by creating affinity groups and hosting community events that center various identities.

**Feminism** can refer to any of a number of perspectives that take as their subject matter the problems and perspectives of women or the nature of biological and social phenomena related to gender. While the term originated with the women's suffrage movement in the 19th century, it now is associated with a variety of issues and approaches related to gender inequities. [adapted from the [American Psychological Association](#)]

**Neurodiversity** is the idea that it's normal and acceptable for people to have brains that function differently from one another. Rather than thinking there is something wrong or problematic when some people don't operate similarly to others, neurodiversity embraces the differences in both brain function and behavioral traits as a natural element of how diverse the human population is. [[Verywell Mind](#)]

**Race** and **ethnicity** are not always easily defined, but you can read more about them at the provided links [[Race and Racial Identity | National Museum of African American History and Culture](#), [Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity](#)]. Here are some examples of racial and ethnic identities:

- Examples of racial identities are: "White/Caucasian", "Black", "Asian"
- Examples of ethnic identities are: "German", "Chicanx", "Ethiopian"

## Identity

**Identity** refers to the way a person defines themselves as an individual and in the context of society. Everybody has both a personal identity (e.g., Erikson, 1968) and a social identity (e.g., Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Personal identity is how people think of and define themselves as unique individuals ('I'), while social identity refers to the ways in which people self-categorize into groups ('we').

*Example:* You see yourself as someone who's introverted, likes to read, and hates olives. Those are aspects of your personal identity. You also consider yourself to be a middle-class, White, woman scientist from the Southern U.S. Those are aspects of your social identity.

**Identity safety** is the notion that social identities of participants in a space (such as students in a classroom) are an asset rather than a barrier to success in the space. [adapted from [identitysafeclassrooms.com](http://identitysafeclassrooms.com)]

**Intersectionality** describes the ways in which systems of inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class and other forms of discrimination "intersect" to create unique dynamics and effects. [[Center for Intersectional Justice](http://Center for Intersectional Justice)]

**Minority groups** are population subgroups with social, religious, ethnic, racial, or other characteristics that differ from those of the majority of the population. The term is sometimes extended to cover any group that is the subject of oppression and discrimination, whether or not it literally comprises a minority of the population. [[American Psychological Association](http://American Psychological Association)]

**Privilege** refers to certain social advantages, benefits, or degrees of prestige and respect that an individual has by virtue of belonging to certain social identity groups. [García, 2018].

*Example:* Financial stability is a form of privilege in higher education -- those who have it are at an advantage because money makes certain aspects of academic institutions easier to access and navigate.

**Stereotypes** are overgeneralized beliefs about a particular category of people [Cardwell 1999]

*Example:* "women care more about clothes than computers".

**Stereotype threat** is a socially premised psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one's group applies [Steele & Aronson, 1995]

*Example:* suppose a female colleague is asked what she did over the weekend, and she spent the weekend shopping. A threat the female colleague might face in answering this question is to be subjected to the stereotype that women care more about clothes than computers.

## Gender and Sexual Orientation

**Cisgender** is a gender description for when someone's sex assigned at birth and gender identity align (e.g., someone who was assigned male at birth, and identifies as a man). The word cisgender can also be shortened to "cis." [[University of Tennessee Chattanooga](http://University of Tennessee Chattanooga)]

**Gender expression** is the external display of one's gender, through a combination of clothing, grooming, demeanor, social behavior, and other factors, generally attributed on scales of masculinity and femininity. Also referred to as "gender presentation." [[University of Tennessee Chattanooga](#)]

**Gender identity** is the internal perception of one's gender, and how they label themselves, based on how much they align or don't align with what they understand their options for gender to be. Often conflated with biological sex, or sex assigned at birth. [[University of Tennessee Chattanooga](#)]

**Heteronormativity** is the assumption, in individuals and/or in institutions, that everyone is heterosexual and that heterosexuality is superior to all other sexualities. Leads to invisibility and stigmatizing of other sexualities: when learning a woman is married, asking her what her husband's name is. Heteronormativity also leads us to assume that only masculine men and feminine women are straight. [[University of Tennessee Chattanooga](#)]

**Non-binary** is a term for gender identities that fall outside of the binary of man or woman. [[University of Tennessee Chattanooga](#)]

**Sex** is a medical term used to refer to the chromosomal, hormonal and anatomical characteristics that are used to classify an individual as female, male, or intersex. Often referred to as simply "sex," "physical sex," "anatomical sex," or specifically as "sex assigned at birth." [[University of Tennessee Chattanooga](#)]

**Sexual orientation** is the type of attraction one has the capacity to feel for others, generally labeled based on the gender relationship between the person and the people they are attracted to. [[University of Tennessee Chattanooga](#)]

**Transgender** is an umbrella term for anyone whose sex assigned at birth and gender identity do not align (e.g., someone who was assigned male at birth, but does not identify as a man). [[University of Tennessee Chattanooga](#)]

## Interpersonal interactions

**Allyship** is an active, consistent, and arduous practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person in a position of privilege and power seeks to operate in solidarity with a marginalized group [The anti-oppression network, 2019<sup>1</sup>]. For a more detailed introduction to what it means to act as an ally, see the [Guide to Allyship](#).

**Boundaries:** Personal boundaries are like invisible bubbles that give a sense of agency over one's physical space, body, and feelings [Healthline, [No BS Guide](#)].

**Power / Power dynamics:** *Power* refers to a person's ability to exert influence and control. *Power dynamics* describes how power affects a relationship between two or more people, especially if one member is in a position of more or less power than the others. [GoodTherapy.org]

*Example:* There is an inherent power dynamic between an advisor and their advisee: the advisor has a greater ability to exert influence and control because they are a faculty member, while the advisee has less ability to exert influence and control because they are a student.

**Self-advocacy:** Self-advocacy refers to an individual's ability to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate, or assert his or her own interests, desires, needs, and rights. It involves making informed decisions and taking responsibility for those decisions [VanReusen *et al*, 1994].

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<sup>1</sup> Although this is not a peer-reviewed site, this definition is cited by peer-reviewed work [Nixon 2019]

## Mechanisms of Harm

**Ableism** is the discrimination of and social prejudice against people with disabilities based on the belief that typical abilities are superior. It can happen on individual levels (e.g., refusing to provide accommodations to a student, mocking people with disabilities) and structural and systemic levels (e.g., buildings designed without accessible entrances or without Braille on elevator buttons).

[[Accessliving.org](https://www.accessliving.org/)]

**Implicit bias** refers to unconscious attitudes, reactions, stereotypes, and categories that affect behavior and understanding. In higher education, implicit bias often refers to unconscious racial or socioeconomic bias towards students, which can be as frequent as explicit bias [Boysen, et. al 2009].

**Institutional bias:** Those established laws, customs, and practices which systematically reflect and produce group-based inequities in any society. An institution may be biased whether or not the individuals maintaining those practices have biased intentions. [[Henry 2010](#)]

**Marginalization** is both a condition and a process that prevents individuals and groups from full participation in social, economic, and political life enjoyed by the wider society [Alakhunova et al, 2015]

**Microaggressions** are the brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual-orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group [Sue, Capodilupo et al. 2007]

**Oppression** is a combination of prejudice and institutional power that creates a system that discriminates against some groups (often called “target groups”) and benefits other groups (often called “dominant groups”). Examples of these systems are racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, classism, ageism, and antisemitism. These systems enable dominant groups to exert control over target groups by limiting their rights, freedom, and access to basic resources such as health care, education, employment, and housing. [Vanderbilt University, Understanding Privilege and Oppression Handout ([download](#))]