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In this file photo, Duke University students gather outside for a class taught by a lecturing fellow in the Thompson Writing Program at Duke.

## *At our NC universities, DEI is about more than being woke*

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We've seen a lot of discussion stating that professors have a woke agenda supporting diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI). As college educators, we want to provide a more nuanced view of DEI work on college campuses and classrooms.

Often, DEI discussions focus solely on race and gender. But effective DEI efforts ensure that every student has a welcoming and fair environment in which to learn. We hope we can all find common ground in this goal of supporting every student's learning. Let us demonstrate what we mean.

Picture this: 300 students in a large college lecture hall. The professor asks a question, and nobody raises their hand. Some students shift uncomfortably. Others aren't paying attention at all. Two students raise their arms into the air. One is called upon, answers sufficiently, and the lecture

continues. In that room, 298 students were not being engaged in the professor's question. While some were likely opting to answer silently in their mind, two students were getting practice and many were being left behind.

Now, picture this class: 300 students in a lecture hall and the room is quiet. Students are silently reading a question that appears on the large screen in front of the room and on their computer screens. They are all answering the question through their devices. Few students appear off-task or asleep. Next, the professor cues all students to share their reasoning to their classmates, and students turn to each other in small groups of two or three. The room erupts into noise. The teaching assistants and the professor walk around, engaging with groups of students. The professor signals to the students to quiet down, shares insights from group discussions, and provides expertise before moving to another activity.

The professor in the second class is effective at engaging all students in a welcoming and fair envi-

ronment. All students have opportunities to practice explaining ideas with their classmates and hone their critical thinking skills. These techniques work well for quiet or shy students who are not likely to raise their hand. The strategies also work well for students who are afraid their ideas may be wrong or unpopular by giving them the chance to share it with a few peers first. Students who are struggling to understand have a chance to ask clarifying questions to classmates or instructors. Students who have trouble with focused attention, get a "reset" in their brain and a chance to practice.

The second professor is working hard to ensure that all students make the most of their learning. Are you opposed to what is happening in the second class? We hope not because we have a lot of evidence that these kinds of inclusive strategies help all students.

Plenty of recent news demonstrates we don't all agree about how important identities like race and gender are to an educational experience. Yet we feel pretty certain that student success is a com-

mon — yet misunderstood — goal of college DEI efforts. In our work, we've met thousands of educators and always ask them what kinds of differences students bring to their classrooms that matter to student learning. Their lists include ideas such as whether students also have a job, the type of high school they attended, whether they are multilingual, if they have learning challenges — so much more than race and gender.

Words like inclusion and equity are not the enemy. Most importantly, the actions that help every student's learning are not the enemy. Supporting every student's learning is the responsibility of educators, and we hope you will see that many of us take that charge very seriously. This isn't about being woke — it is about meeting our students where they are and helping them make the most of their education.

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