Practical Inclusion Strategies for Student Leaders

As part of the Engineer Together initiative, the College of Engineering’s Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee is excited to share practical inclusion strategies that can be implemented in any event where students are gathered. This list will continue to grow and change over time, so we hope you will check our DEI website (eng.auburn.edu/dei) for the most up-to-date list so we can continuously improve our inclusion efforts within the College.

I. Acknowledge Bias
   a. Take the initiative to learn about different cultures (foods, festivals, religions, etc.).
   b. Undergo bias training with prompted self-reflection.
      i. Are decisions motivated purely by the advancement of the organization or are there ulterior motives?
      ii. Do friends of those on the leadership team get assigned tasks or given preferential treatment because of their relationship with leaders?
   c. When making decisions that will impact the entire group, only consider necessary skills.
   d. Consider anonymous member surveys to ensure their interests are considered rather than putting members where they don’t want to be.
   e. Create a safe environment for others to ask questions.
   f. Have anonymous check-in surveys throughout the year for members to complete to receive feedback on any bias they feel they may be experiencing.

II. Acknowledge Holidays and Celebrations
   a. Be aware of ALL holidays, even those not observed on the official AU calendar. Have a conversation with members about the process of being excused from a meeting for religious holidays and set the expectation that members can come to you with questions about holidays and celebrations.
   b. Incorporate all holidays into meetings so members know you are aware of those “less celebrated” holidays such as Good Friday, Ash Wednesday, etc. Have a conversation with your organization at the beginning of the semester about the process of requesting an excused absence for religious holidays. Set the expectation early on that members can come to you with questions about holidays and celebrations.
   c. Turn on the “Religious Holidays” calendar in whatever platform you use (Outlook and Google calendars both have this feature).
d. Create a shared calendar that would allow any members to add a holiday they may celebrate.
e. Celebrate all end of the year holidays with your members, not just Christmas.

III. Apologize and (re)Commit
a. Provide structured time and guidance for self-reflections to help individuals identify problems in their own behavior. This could be incorporated into an organization meeting once a month or on an as-needed basis.
b. Include statements in your membership packets encouraging students to inform you about actions they find problematic.
c. Identify and train third-party allies who can facilitate conversations when an apology is needed.
d. Be willing to admit your faults, and show intent to improve.
   i. Don’t be defensive
   ii. Don’t make it about you – the other person’s feelings are real regardless of your intention

IV. Celebrate Inclusive Behavior
a. Encourage your organization to set goals for inclusion with awards or rewards for those who meet them.
b. Be intentional about making sure celebrations such as birthday shout outs are done for everyone. If you do for one, you should do for all.
c. Make outcomes related to respectful teamwork a part of the foundation for your organization.
d. Be quick to complement others when you notice inclusive behavior as a way to encourage additional efforts.
e. Have a new member survey where you can gain insight into what new members want to get out of their membership. Also makes new members feel like they have a voice.

V. Consider Implications of Time
a. When planning events outside of normal meeting hours, consider the schedules of members with children and those with pets. It’s always a good idea to check with potential participants about life conflicts before planning an event. Be considerate of students who may have jobs that prevent them from being able to meet to work on a group assignment outside of normal meeting times. Also consider family and church obligations.
b. Consider the time of your meetings. Some students may not feel comfortable walking home in the dark after late meetings. Students can park closer to buildings after 5 pm.
c. Be aware of major project and exam schedules when scheduling additional meetings. Consider moving regularly scheduled meetings to a different date/time if most members have a large exam the next day.
d. Consider religious periods/holidays during the day when scheduling meetings or events. Be flexible as needed when employees or students have a religious conflict for religious reasons during the day.
e. Consider offering an online option for students who want to attend but cannot physically be on campus for a meeting.
f. Utilize GroupMe and ask if meeting times work for students before scheduling.
g. Alternate meetings to be held on M/W/F and T/R to allow more students to have the opportunity to attend based on class schedules.

h. Record meetings for students unable to attend to watch later to stay in the loop or take minutes to share with all members following each meeting.

i. Proactively communicate about key meetings each semester.

j. Consider extending election voting so students unable to attend in-person could vote virtually.

k. Consider only scheduling meetings when 75% (or whatever percentage works for your organization) of members are able to attend. Can decide on this by a poll (GroupMe, DoodlePoll, WhenToMeet, etc.).

l. To stay on track during meeting, set a timer for each portion and move on from that topic once timer goes off.

m. Begin and end meetings on time.

VI. Foster an Environment of Transparency and Feedback

a. Provide training for leadership that includes guided conversations on how to support transparency with members and how to effectively give feedback.

b. Make meetings more informal so everyone feels comfortable expressing opinions and concerns.

c. Make an effort to have a diverse leadership team so everyone see themselves reflected in their leadership.

d. Be honest with members about the state of the organization.

e. Offer consistent updates and provide documentation as needed.

f. Provide anonymous surveys for members to complete to give feedback.

g. Let all members vote on any proposed changes to the organization instead of leaders making all of the decisions.

VII. Cultivate Community from Multiple Touchpoints

a. Facilitate formal introductions at events.

b. Actively invite people to in-person to events.

c. Offer a mix of formal meetings and social events to build community among members.

d. Ask members what they want to see from leadership.

e. Coordinate a meet and greet between old and new members.

f. Be sure to send open invitations for lunches, events, etc. Send reminders and/or a calendar invite to help increase attendance.

g. Encourage students to join other clubs/organizations they may not have considered.

   i. Combine efforts with other organizations as appropriate to host similar events.

h. Be mindful when creating student groups to ensure that you are promoting new interactions without isolating certain students.

i. Create programs for populations with specific needs.

j. Ensure accessibility to attend programs and opportunities. Create an easy registration process and ensure point of contact is clearly noted if someone needs to request accommodations.

   i. Can also include “Accommodations” box in registration form.
k. Utilize multiple forms of communication when relaying information: email, GroupMe, social media.
l. Offer more in-person outreach opportunities that specifically target freshmen students.
m. Ask professors and advisors to advertise events to students in their classes.

VIII. Food Choices at Events

a. Include a disclaimer when sending out invitations to events that will include food so participants know what to expect and can plan ahead as needed.
b. Provide a description of the food being served, including ingredients list.
   i. If doing a potluck event, be sure everyone writes out ingredient list on an index card.
c. Ask during registration process for an event that will serve food if a participant requires dietary accommodations that will not be met with what is being served.
d. Include options for major allergies and food preferences (gluten free, dairy free, vegetarian, etc.).
e. Plan ahead for food offering at events by providing adequate choices.
f. Be mindful when passing out snacks/candy at meetings and ensure that no students have a severe allergy to what you are passing out (i.e. allergic to peanut butter).
g. Accommodate students who are bringing their own food due to a dietary restrictions, such as providing a microwave or refrigerator if needed.

IX. Names and Pronunciations

a. Ask how to pronounce at the beginning of your conversation and repeat it back. You can follow-up at the end to ask one more time and ensure whoever you are talking to that you will do your best to remember their name.
b. Try to correctly say someone’s name when first meeting someone. Always show an effort to pronounce their name in future interactions – everyone appreciates the effort.
c. Write their name down in the way it is pronounced to help you remember the pronunciation, but be discreet and remember to write their name correctly on official documents.
d. Acknowledge your limitations with committing a name and its pronunciation to memory. Again, the effort is what matters.
e. If you pronounce someone’s name wrong, apologize and ask for pronunciation again.

X. Utilize Gender Pronouns

a. Add your pronouns to your email signature and on Zoom meetings to encourage others to share their pronouns.
b. Add your pronouns to your nametag as applicable to encourage others who want to share their pronouns to do the same.
c. Introduce yourself as your pronoun (Hi. I’m John Doe and I use the pronouns he/him/his).
d. Make the effort to use pronouns correctly!