



During the past year and a half, the Center for Teaching and Learning and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion have been pleased to co-sponsor discussion forums bringing together student groups and faculty. The purpose of this Teaching Tip is to highlight this unique learning opportunity.

**Background:** At a professional development conference in August 2019, I heard a presentation by Dr. Laura Pipe, who serves as the Associate Director for the Teaching Learning Commons at the University of North Carolina in Greensboro. She and her colleagues created a unique program designed to share viewpoints of inclusive student experiences ([VOISES](#)). Specifically, their discussions were designed to allow faculty, graduate assistants, and staff to better understand the experiences of students. Dr. Pipe noted that students are rarely asked to share their personal experiences and often their voices are absent from faculty dialogues and formal training on inclusive classroom development. I was intrigued by their program and with her permission have implemented a similar one at NMU. I created the acronym IDEA for our program which stands for *Inclusive Discussions for Educational Awareness*.

**Aim:** The main objective of IDEA is to provide faculty, graduate assistants, and staff with an opportunity to better understand the unique experiences of our students. We hope these discussions will promote reflection on teaching and strategies for faculty to support students who self-identify within various groups on campus. It's important that student voices be a part of the conversations so that their personal experiences and perspectives are shared with faculty.

**Format:** To date, we have had three IDEA forums with panelists from the Black Student Union, Native American Student Association, and Queers and Allies. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, two of these forums were held via Zoom. During a forum, the panelists are asked five initial questions which were provided in advance by a moderator who is selected by the students. The students are encouraged to think about their learning experiences and what faculty members did or could have done to make their classroom learning better. The following questions are used:

1. Tell us about your journey to college.
2. What has been your best experience in the classroom?
3. What has been the most challenging experience in the classroom?
4. What has been your best and most challenging experience on campus?
5. What has been your best and most challenging experience in Marquette?

**Creating a Safe Space:** Please note, the IDEA forums whether face-to-face or virtual are structured to protect the students and provide an environment where power is intentionally shifted away from the audience (i.e. faculty). During the forum, faculty are not permitted to speak or unmute their microphones to ask questions or make comments out loud, which could disrupt the protected space and shift the focus from the students. Audience members are encouraged to write questions on note cards or to use the Zoom chat function to privately send questions to the moderator. The moderator then determines which questions to ask the panel, allowing for the combination of similar questions and adjustments to provide the students with more context. Zoom forums are not recorded.

Prior to leaving the structured space, faculty, graduate assistants, and staff are asked to remember the need to protect the students and their narratives as much as possible. If faculty wish to share key points or lessons learned, they are encouraged to speak using only generalities, not to attribute any story to a specific student, or use students' names.

In closing, I wish to thank our past moderators: Drs. Keenan Colquitt, Jud Sojourn, and Gary Stark as well as the students who served as panelists. I encourage faculty and graduate assistants to consider attending future IDEA events.

As we approach the end of the semester, please know that the CTL staff and I are available to assist with all of your course design, instructional technology, and EduCat gradebook issues (a common problem for me). Please call 227-2483 for an appointment or email [ctl@nmu.edu](mailto:ctl@nmu.edu). Visit the [CTL calendar](#) to review upcoming professional development offerings. Feel free share your feedback and any ideas for future Teaching Tips or suggestions for faculty workshops with me: [ctlscholar@nmu.edu](mailto:ctlscholar@nmu.edu).

#### Reference

Evans, J. (2020, March 9). *VOISES: A panel of student experiences*. University of North Carolina-Greensboro. <https://news.uncg.edu/voises-a-panel-of-student-experiences/>