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DIVERSITY-SENSITIVE EDUCATION IN LAW AND CRIMINOLOGY: A PILOT PROJECT AT GHENT UNIVERSITY

Introduction

Importance of diversity-sensitive education for Law and Criminology professionals

- Societal advancements highlight diversity, prompting laws to protect rights and prevent discrimination.
- Diversity involves visible and hidden traits that shape individual and societal experiences.
- Higher education plays a key role in preparing students for meaningful societal contributions.
- Developing diversity competencies in law and criminology students is essential.
- Incorporating diversity into curricula and learning environments is vital.
- An inclusive student experience boosts engagement, belonging, and learning outcomes.

Diversity-sensitive education at Ghent University

- Ghent University has seen increased student diversity, reflecting global trends.
- Despite the benefits of diversity, challenges remain in retaining vulnerable students.
- Ghent University prioritizes diversity-sensitive education at program and pedagogical levels.

Project overview

DIVSCAN 1.0 : Diversity-sensitive education at Ghent University

Reflection tool

Motivation and barriers	Reflect on intrinsic motivation and obstacles in diversity-sensitive teaching.
Course design	Inclusion of diversity in course content and learning materials.
Teaching methods	Promote diversity in classroom interactions and learning environments.
Student guidance	Focus on diversity in mentoring and supporting students.
Assessment	Ensure fairness and equity in student evaluation.
Final reflection	Goal-setting for continuous professional development.



DIVSCAN 2.0: Diversity-sensitive education in Law and Criminology

Student input

Interviews




Student perspectives were pivotal in shaping the initiative's focus, ensuring that diversity-sensitive practices resonate with both students' needs and academic goals.

Key student concerns

- **Safe learning environment:** Need for a positive student-teacher and student-student dynamic, emphasizing respect, confidentiality, and open communication. Ensuring minority inclusion, avoiding stereotypes.
- **Multiperspectivism:** Focus on diversifying learning materials and teaching methods, calling for a critical examination of historical perspectives (e.g., colonialism) and better representation of diverse viewpoints in the curriculum.
- **Feedback:** Need for clear, transparent, practical and regular feedback, tailored to individual progress.

Educator workshops

Three workshops (3 hours each) providing theoretical frameworks while emphasizing practical applications to make diversity part of everyday teaching.

Safe learning environment 	Exploring strategies for creating inclusive environments. Exchanging insights on improving student-teacher interactions and fostering trust.
Multiperspectivism 	Formulating diversity-sensitive learning objectives. Integrating underrepresented academic voices. Encouraging critical engagement with case studies and current events.
Feedback 	Delivering inclusive, constructive feedback. Encouraging to acknowledge diversity in learning styles and to incorporate a variety of feedback methods.



DIVSCAN 3.0: Online course for educators in Law and Criminology

Safe learning environment: Ensures all students feel valued regardless of their backgrounds.

Educator-student interaction

Connectedness	Encourages bonds among students to promote collaboration and empathy.
Active engagement	Involvement enhances student motivation and understanding.
Transparency	Clear expectations foster trust and preparedness among students.
Support and empowerment	Promotes academic and personal growth for all students.



Interactions among students

Community building	Bonds among students create a supportive environment.
Collaborative learning	Active participation improves understanding and social skills.
Respectful communication	Encourages diverse opinions while establishing guidelines for dialogue.



Multiperspectivism: Incorporates multiple viewpoints and experiences into the curriculum.

Learning objectives	Multiperspectivism should be a core part of course objectives to promote critical thinking and empathy.
Course content	Include diverse perspectives alongside traditional approaches to enhance understanding.
Educational materials and methods	Utilize diverse materials and teaching methods to expose students to various viewpoints.

Inclusive feedback: Constructive and supports students' learning needs and backgrounds.

Acknowledgment of diversity	Feedback should consider students' backgrounds and socio-emotional competencies.
Engagement in feedback processes	Students must feel heard and respected, particularly those from minority groups.
Accessibility of feedback	Ensure that feedback is approachable and relevant to all students.

Insights from the DIVSCAN project

Awareness and engagement	Cultivating understanding about the significance of diversity-sensitive education is crucial. Providing support and training equips to deliver effective, inclusive education.
Faculty involvement	Actively engage faculties in designing and implementing diversity initiatives to utilize their expertise and commitment.
Student participation	Involving students in program design and evaluation ensures their perspectives and needs are integrated.

Translating awareness into action	Educators may understand the importance of diversity but struggle to apply it practically in the classroom. Sustained effort is needed to overcome biases and implement inclusive methodologies.
Sustained engagement	Competing priorities can lead to disengagement from diversity initiatives over time. Recognizing the ongoing nature of promoting diversity is essential for maintaining momentum.
Risk of tokenism	Superficial engagement with diversity issues can trivialize marginalized experiences. Genuine efforts must be made to address underlying structural inequalities.
Resistance to change	Some may see diversity initiatives as threats to academic freedom or traditional priorities. Overcoming resistance requires effective communication and recognition of diversity's benefits.

Student input

Focus groups

21 students from various faculties participated, including international students.

Key student concerns

- Importance of open, inclusive dialogue and a safe learning environment.
- Need for inclusive language (especially gender-related) and diverse perspectives.
- Issues with bias in course materials (e.g., religion) and lack of real-world relevance in curricula.
- Appreciation for online flexibility and emphasis on accessibility, fairness, and transparency.

Integration into workshops

Student feedback used to inform educator workshops.

Coaching trajectory

Two workshops (2 hours each) focusing on diversity-sensitive pedagogy.

First workshop	Contextualization of the pilot project and focus on increasing student success rates. Illustration of biases and stereotypes. Emphasis on interaction, discussion, and sharing of strategies among educators.
Second workshop	Educators shared experiences via Padlet before the session. Theme: Multiperspectivism, encouraging diverse perspectives in teaching. Online workshop with breakout rooms for exchanging ideas.

Conclusion

- While strategies for promoting diversity awareness show promise, it is vital to address potential challenges.
- By understanding both strengths and pitfalls, educators can more effectively foster inclusive learning environments where all students thrive.