

# EXPLORING POSITIONALITY IN THE CLASSROOM CONTEXT

STEARNS CENTER FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

George Mason University



## Define Your "Why"

- Increased recruitment and retention
- Harm reduction
- Connect with university initiatives
- Intrinsic motivation
- Or something else?

## Positionality Resource Objectives

- Understand and explore positionality in the classroom
- Apply the concept of positionality to your course and concepts
- Develop an action plan for student engagement in this space
- Create connections with student learning outcomes, including the Mason Core Global Contexts designation

## Core Principles

### Defining Positionality

Positionality includes how our individual identities\* are constructed and shaped and on how these identities influence our view of the world, particularly with respect to those with whom we interact<sup>(4)</sup>

\*Social identity refers to the ways that people's self-concepts are based on their membership in social groups.<sup>(1-3)</sup>



### Consider the Instructor's Positionality

- How instructors exist and interact (with each other and with students) in spaces varies
- Students' response to similar situations or statements will vary based on instructor identities and students' perceptions of instructors
- Institutional support likely also varies, sometimes significantly, amongst instructors

### Positionality Tip

Students may need assistance in understanding that they have a positionality.

Understanding how one has a position within the world, and how one's view on the world shapes this, is an important step to understanding one's positionality.

### Consider the Student's Positionality

- How students exist and interact (with each other and with instructors) in spaces varies
- Students' understanding of positionality and their own experiences within a larger world often varies

# Positionality in the Mason Core Classroom

## Mason Core: Global Contexts Designation

The goal of the Global Contexts (GC) core requirement is to enable students to explore global contexts through a disciplinary lens and to understand how global systems have created both interdependence and inequalities that engaged citizens must understand in order to work toward an equitable and sustainable future.



**The Mason Core GC outcome is focused on making positionality an intellectual moment and the intellectual move of your discipline.**

### Identify & Explain

Identify and explain how patterns of global connections across nations and/or cultures have shaped societies to create interdependence and inequality.

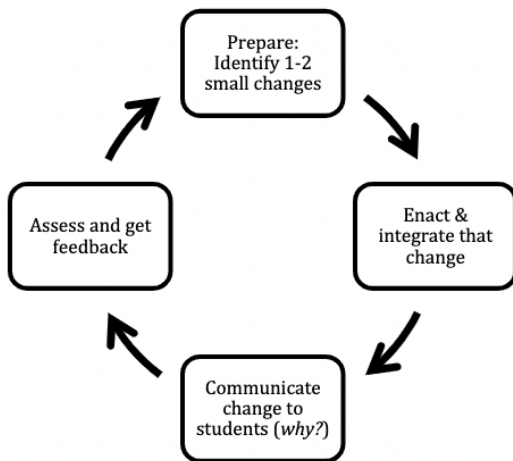
### Use

Use a disciplinary lens to demonstrate knowledge of how at least one nation and/or culture participates in or is affected by global contexts.

### Apply

Apply an understanding of one's own positionality within a globally interdependent and unequal world to analyze solutions to global problems.

## Example Positionality Activity Components



### How might you design an activity or assignment that includes positionality?

- Reflecting on student's role and view as a student at a large research university in North America
- Writing about roles and perspectives as if they were a current professional in the field of study
- Discussing how their interactions in a situation as a working professional may be impacted if they are or are not a member of a community
- Analyzing how their contemporary or present-day viewpoint impacts their interpretation of past events

## Reflections

- How is positionality understood and what does positionality look like in your discipline?
- What are some examples of students' positionality that are educationally and professionally relevant in your discipline?



## Readings and Resources

- (1) <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/psychology/social-identity-theory>
- (2) <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/B9780123864918000098>, citing foundational work by Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979
- (3) <https://lsa.umich.edu/social-solutions/news-events/news/insights-and-solutions/infographics/intersectionality--positionality--and-privilege.html>