

Bill Watson

(612) 408-9745 | fwatson@law.harvard.edu | billwatson.net
109 Griswold Hall, 1525 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02138

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement

I'm strongly committed to being an effective teacher for all my students. Achieving that goal requires that I actively take into account the diverse backgrounds and experiences that my students bring to the classroom so that they feel welcome, supported, and ready to learn.

In my teaching experience thus far, I've had the benefit of teaching diverse groups of students. Many of my students have had quite different backgrounds from my own. It is important that I strive to understand how they perceive the course material and assessments, my remarks in class, and comments from other students. To that end, I aim to always bear in mind that students do not come from just one mold—for instance, they may have different levels of familiarity with the expectations and conventions of a law-school classroom, and they may be experiencing different stressors or distractions in their lives outside of class.

Some more specific ways that I aim to foster inclusivity include quickly memorizing each student's name at the start of each semester; tracking participation and trying to bring as many students into the conversation as possible; and using small-group activities to give students another mode of engaging with the class. I also recognize that promoting inclusion requires ensuring that students who need help feel comfortable asking for it. To that end, I work hard to make myself accessible to students by staying after class to talk with them, making regular announcements that I'm available to meet during office hours or by appointment, and directly reaching out to students who appear to be struggling.

I'm excited to take advantage of institutional resources that can help me make my classroom more inclusive and welcoming. While pursuing my PhD, I spent a year as a Graduate Teaching Fellow for Cornell's Center for Teaching Innovation, where I organized and led workshops on pedagogy for other graduate students. As part of the fellowship, I participated in a course titled "Teaching & Learning in the Diverse Classroom." The course encouraged me to examine how students' social identities impact their experience of higher education and to better appreciate how implicit biases—i.e., subconscious judgments based on unexamined assumptions about what is typical or normal—can stand in the way of students' success.

One challenge that may arise, especially in the public-law courses that I wish to teach, is where one student says something that offends or could offend others. How a teacher responds in these situations is important and, no doubt, requires case-by-case judgment, depending on what was said, the specific students involved, and the temperature of the room. Sometimes, the best response may be to give the offending student a chance to backtrack. At other times, the best response may involve a more affirmative intervention, like reminding the class that we're discussing sensitive issues and letting them know that a certain comment was inappropriate. Being prepared for these situations takes forethought, and I look forward to collaborating with colleagues on how to manage them effectively so that students can feel supported and respected.