

Implicit Bias

A Guide to Mitigating Bias in the Classroom

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What is Implicit Bias?

Bias is prejudice in favor of or against a thing, person, or group as compared to another. It is the result of conscious thought and actions. Implicit bias, however, is an unconscious process in which we are unaware of or mistaken about our biases. Separate from racism, sexism, homophobia, or other conscious beliefs, implicit bias influences our thoughts and actions in ways of which we are not aware.



Everyone has implicit biases. Research suggests that implicit biases may have more influence over our thoughts and actions than our conscious thoughts, a result of the amount of information our brains work to process at any given time. Years of messaging from society may influence these biases, enforcing stereotypes as our brains make judgements based on our past experiences, education, and background.

How Does Implicit Bias Affect Medical Education?

Implicit bias is associated with poor health outcomes, increasing health costs, and exacerbated health disparities. It inhibits patient-provider relationships, resulting in issues such as substandard pain management for black patients and lack of access to specialty care. [Studies](#) suggest that medical education may contribute to these issues, calling for a change to the way in which we present information and discuss diversity issues.

Implicit bias may indirectly influence medical education starting with the admissions selection process and continuing through presentation of biased information in the classroom and clinical settings. Automatically stereotyping individuals in the classroom or patient care settings has a negative impact on students' well-being and patient care outcomes. Addressing implicit bias thus needs to begin in the educational setting, with conscious efforts to mitigate bias and its effects in the classroom and other training arenas.

Efforts to mitigate bias in medical education begins with diversifying the admissions process. It continues with efforts to reduce or eliminate bias in the presentation of clinical information and incorporation of reflection activities to foster continual personal growth.



How Do I Develop an Awareness of My Biases?



Implicit biases can be overridden with conscious effort. The first step is identifying where your biases exist and how they may influence your thoughts and actions.

Harvard’s Project Implicit offers several [Implicit Association Tests](#) online that provide feedback to you on your own implicit biases. This tool offers 15 different tests, including race, age, and sexuality. After taking the test, you will receive a report with your results.

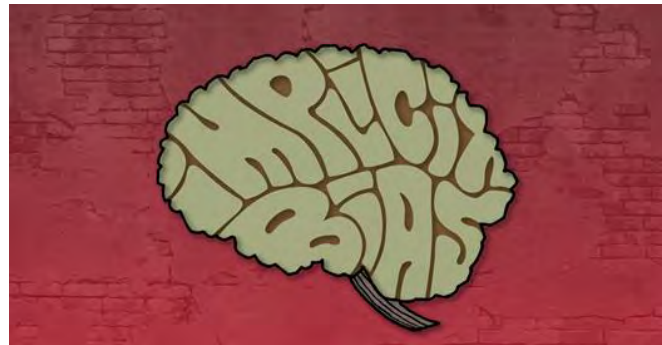
Reflect on your results. What, if anything, surprises you? Are your results in contrast to your conscious thoughts and actions? If so, how? After reflection on your results, discuss them with a trusted mentor or colleague to gain additional perspective. How might your results influence the way you approach this topic in the future? How can you make positive change?

Next, reflect on how your biases may influence your thoughts and actions as an educator. Do you share biased information without realizing it? Do you inadvertently reinforce stereotypes? Do you treat people differently without realizing it? These conscious reflections will help you learn to recognize your biases over time so you can work to mitigate them.

How Do I Mitigate Bias in My Teaching?

Review the article “[Misrepresenting Race – The Role of Medical Schools in Propagating Physician Bias](#).” This article presents a five-dimension framework for assessing and modifying information presented in the classroom.

Use the [Reflection Checklist for Assessing Bias in Teaching Materials](#) tool to review your curricular materials. This tool is meant to foster reflection and modification, asking questions such as why or why not images are used when providing clinical examples in your teaching.



Encourage your students to report any concerns they have regarding information presented in the curriculum. Students are welcome to contact their instructors or course leaders directly, report concerns to the Office of Student Affairs, or submit an anonymous report using the [MCW Corporate Compliance Hotline](#). By partnering with our students to address concerns, we can engage in continual improvement efforts for our curriculum to address this issue.

For assistance with reviewing and/or modifying your materials, contact educational_improvement@mcw.edu.