

DEEP POVERTY INITIATIVE

Teachers of Psychology Action Guide



The APA Deep Poverty Initiative recognizes that the classroom environment is one where all four E's -- **Examine, Engage, Empower, and Everybody**—can take place. Towards these goals, we call on psychology teachers specifically to 1) incorporate inclusionary language and practices, specific to individuals living in deep poverty, into their syllabi and coursework, 2) practice allyship towards students on their campus living in deep poverty 3) engage their surrounding community to educate students on the complexity of deep poverty, and 4) lead others on their campuses and in their communities to make similar commitments. The following guide includes action steps to assist educators in achieving APA's call to action to address deep poverty.

Address Socioeconomic Status In Your Syllabi and Course Materials

- Insert a Diversity and Inclusion Statement in your syllabi that specifically names respect for differences in socioeconomic status (e.g., *"I am committed to affirming the identities, realities and voices of all students, especially those from historically marginalized or underrepresented backgrounds, and I strive for participants in this class to do the same. This [semester/quarter/year] we will work to create an inclusive environment for all, which means we will use person-centered language, respect for the experiences of others, and recognize differences in race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, religion, and socioeconomic status [and any other memberships/identities as applicable]."*¹
- Insert resources that address basic needs in your syllabi (e.g., "Any student who faces challenges securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact [insert best campus resource person for this, e.g., Dean of Students] for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable the instructor to provide any resources available to them."²
- Explore your school's absence and tardy policies (if any). Determine what accommodations you can make in your own classroom for students dealing with structural factors that may inhibit their full and timely participation (e.g., public transportation, childcare, required case management appointments). If evidence is needed to justify an absence or tardy, consider accepting non-standard forms of "proof" (e.g., notes from "eyewitnesses," pictures, or video) and work with department and

¹ Adapted from <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2018/07/20/how-deal-microaggressions-class-opinion>

² Adapted from <https://medium.com/@saragoldrickrab/basic-needs-security-and-the-syllabus-d24cc7afe8c9>

school administration (if necessary) to accept these as “legitimate.” documentation. Clearly state your policies regarding absences, tardiness, and any exceptions in your syllabi.

- Examine both your own biases and skill in handling discussion around deep poverty by using a tool like the one in Appendix 1 at the beginning of the semester and at the midterm. Make specific plans to address any categories in which you lack expertise or skill. In addition, practice how to deal with microaggressions (e.g., [confronting microaggressions](#), [responding to microaggressions](#)), and difficult dialogs in general (e.g., [navigating dialogues about diversity](#)) before the semester begins. Return to these resources periodically to refresh yourself and to practice your responses or evaluate your progress.
- Review all learning materials, ensuring that they are free from (explicit or implicit) bias. If you have control over your curriculum, consider either eliminating the material or encouraging students to critically analyze it as part of the learning process. If you do not have control over curriculum, bring your concerns to those who make curricular decisions and advocate for removal or contextualization.
- Include materials written or created by people of different socioeconomic backgrounds and/or perspectives (readings, videotapes, etc.) that address underrepresented groups' experience of deep poverty, in ways that do not trivialize or marginalize these groups' experiences. Include both sources that address whiteness and social class to avoid perpetuating stereotypes about people of color and poverty, as well as materials that illuminate the structural causes of deep poverty, rather than framing it as a personal decision-making issue.
- Tailor lessons to focus on specific themes (e.g., poverty, employment, and income access) related to diversity and equity. Resources for this include [APA Performance Standards With Research](#), [Inclusion of Socioeconomic Status in Psychology Curricula](#), and [Teaching Tolerance](#).

Practice Allyship towards Students on Your Campus Living in Deep Poverty

- Spend time getting to know your students. Learn about them and where they are coming from. Consult the student demographics at your institution to get a sense of the communities and cultures from which your students are coming. Tell stories that allow your students to get to know you and where you are coming from. Practice active listening and follow through with resources that address issues students bring to you.
- Consider whether your communication reaches and is understood by your students. Review the grade level of the writing style/vocabulary used in the communication and how the communication is sent (e.g., digitally or in hard copy). Check for understanding rather than assuming it is understood.
- Provide students, if possible, alternatives to purchasing textbooks and to eliminating extra costs (i.e., printing materials). For example, place required reading on course reserves, create PDF versions of the material which can be accessed online, or print out resources for your class rather than requiring students to do the printing.

- Become familiar with the transportation available to students – is it free, accessible, and reliable? Is there support for students as part of either campus resources or within the community (i.e., vouchers, free/reduced fares with student IDs, carpools). What is the cost and availability of parking on campus? If parking is expensive, can you work with administrators to provide low-cost parking options for those with limited incomes?
- What is your school's policy on lunch time and costs associated with meals – can the students in your classes afford to eat at school? Are students and families aware of any free/reduced price lunch programs and how to apply for them (if applicable)? Consider donating regularly to the school's food pantry or providing food as part of course activities, especially if class meets during mealtimes. If a food pantry doesn't exist, mobilize faculty/staff/administrators to create a food pantry. Familiarize yourself with available, affordable, and ample food options for students when schools are closed.
- Familiarize yourself with what options are available for emergency housing for students facing eviction, as well as free or low-cost university housing during campus closures or holiday breaks.
- Know the resources available to students to support their physical and mental health, including free or reduced cost access to medical doctors (including dentists and ophthalmologists) and mental health providers. Help students understand what debt they are responsible for and which debt hospitals and other providers will “write off” as part of their tax obligation to treat emergent issues in their community.
- Determine if there are any free or reduced cost child-care services on campus. Familiarize yourself with the application process as well as if there is a waiting list for admittance. Be aware of any (planned or unexpected) closures of campus childcare centers and how this may impact the ability of students in your course to participate fully. Consider adjusting your course deadlines to align with childcare calendars/closures.

Expanding Your Classroom into the Community

- Create community-based assignments that cultivate an awareness of deep poverty as a common experience, difficult to exit, harmful, dehumanizing, and solvable by psychologists. For example, have students read local news pertaining to the variety of issues that fall into the subject of deep poverty, keep track of local and state policy pertaining to deep poverty, attend local meetings, including community and school board meetings, identify local social service providers in your school's neighborhood, or work to create physical spaces in the school for social services to serve the surrounding community.
- Design partnerships with existing community groups who work on issues around deep poverty. For example, assign students to a local community-based organization serving individuals in deep poverty in order to who shadow a staff member, observe one section of the organization, or simply volunteer hours. Have students complete an assignment (e.g., write a one-page document, write their legislators, make a presentation, blog post, or video, create an Instagram account or Facebook page) to illustrate how psychological principles are applied by the community-based organization to

confront deep poverty. Check with the community organization to ensure that the assignments meet community needs, in addition to your educational goals for the students.

- Put into practice community engaged teaching by partnering with an organization serving individuals in deep poverty on a new service or service-learning project (see resources like those at [Vanderbilt University](https://www.vanderbilt.edu/peppercenter/engagedteaching/) for step by step instructions).

Encourage other psychologists to address deep poverty in their role as educators

- Ask other faculty in your department or school to incorporate deep poverty education and resources in their syllabi and courses, to become allies to students on their campus living in deep poverty, and to explore ways to expand both their classrooms and the campus into the community. For example, consider reading together and discussing this piece (<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/09/10/magazine/college-inequality.html>) about being a low-income student in college.

Appendix 1: Dialogue Facilitator Skills: Self-Assessment

Instructions:

1. Place a check in the boxes that reflect your practice.
2. Upon completion, at the bottom of your chart add the total amount of checks belonging to every column (Not Competent, Somewhat Competent, Competent, Extremely Competent)
3. Determine where you have room for improvement. We recommend that if you score more than 10 in the categories, Not Competent, Somewhat Competent, you should refer to our resources. Areas where you scored Competent, we recommend you reflect on what types of improvements can be made to your practice. Please refer to our guide for assistance.

Skills	Not Competent	Somewhat Competent	Competent	Extremely Competent
Observation				
Noting tension in groups specific to economic insecurity				
Noting who talks to whom				
Noting interest level in group pertaining to discussion on economic insecurity				
Sensing feelings of individuals during discussions about economic insecurity				
Noting who is being 'Left Out' during discussions about economic insecurity				
Noting reactions to your comments on class, poverty, and deep poverty				

Noting when a group avoids a topic specific to economic insecurity				
Noting covert and overt messages specific to class, poverty and deep poverty				
Emotional Expressiveness				
Staying aware of own emotions				
Expressing gratitude towards student engagement				
Recognizing different cultural expressions of feelings				
Morale Building				
Showing interest in student context				
Working to keep people from being ignored				
Harmonizing, helping people reach agreement				
Upholding rights of individual in the face of group pressure				
Expressing praise or appreciation				
Unpacking conflict constructively				
Ability to Manage Emotional Situations				
Being able to face conflict during conversation on class				
Being able to face disappointment				
Being able to stand silence				
Group Logistics				
Clarifying ground rules for discussion during conflict				
Setting norms for classroom dialogue				
Interventions				
Reminding group of ground rules				
Asking for more participation				
Equalizing participation, without tokenizing students				
Asking for people to take turns speaking, if appropriate				
Making space for quiet members				

Respectfully interrupting/confronting nonproductive behaviors				
Re-focusing group to stay on topic				
Offering compassionate acknowledgment of emotions				
Drawing on personal experiences to move group along				
Commenting on process				
Clarifying issues of conflicts and differences				
Asking for clarification of unclear issues				
Addressing misinformation and stereotypes about class				
TOTAL AMOUNT				

This document is a product of the American Psychological Association Deep Poverty Initiative Working Group.