

Cornell University Center for Teaching Innovation: Instructors Guide to Supporting the Incoming Class

Incoming Class Demographics: Class of 2025 by the numbers

- 49 U.S. states represented
- 64 countries represented
- 55% women
- 19.4% first-generation (729 incoming freshmen are the first in their families to attend college)
- 53.1% students of color in the freshman class
- Cornell Chronicle story: [Pandemic-shaped Class of '25 arrives at Cornell](#)

COVID Disparities

- COVID disrupted the education of ALL first-year Cornell students in the two years before they arrived on campus
- COVID did not affect all students equally.
 - Quality of online learning experiences varied widely
 - COVID struck some students and their families more directly than others
 - Some students' personal and social environments were less conducive to learning than others

How can instructors help?

Support Actions You can Provide

- Acknowledge that you are aware of disparities caused by COVID
- Send a beginning of semester [survey](#)
 - Identify needs, barriers, prior knowledge, attitudes, preferences
- Make yourself [available and approachable](#)
 - [Build community and belonging](#)
 - Engage in sharing, storytelling, and open communication
- Provide several low stakes assessments, especially early in the semester
- Provide opportunities to raise grades throughout semester

Supportive Language You can Use

- Acknowledge challenging situations and topics
- Normalize getting help: making mistakes is a part of growth and learning

- Explain what purpose office hours serve. Encourage them to go early and often in the semester
- Encourage students to form study groups or identify a “study buddy”

Helpful Icebreaker Activities

- **Activity 1: Prepare students to overcome challenges**
 - Share an experience where you felt challenged and how you overcame it
 - Have students do the same, in small groups or as a writing exercise
- **Activity 2: Remind students of their core strengths**
 - Have students write down three characteristics that got them to Cornell?
 - Have students discuss with a partner.

Simple Tips from the Learning Strategies Center

- **Office hours:** Teach students how to use them and what they are for. Encourage them to go early as possible. Encourage them to bring their worries and struggles.
- **Study Partner:** Encourage them to find study partners early in semester.
- **Managing Your Time:** Suggest keeping a semester calendar, Canvas has one built in for students.
- **Note taking:** Have students determine ways that will work for them at the Learning Strategies Center.

Additional information from the [Learning Strategies Center](#)

- [How to study](#)

For More Information

[Center for Teaching Innovation](#) (CTI): CTI instructional designers are available for individual consultations to discuss ideas and strategies for supporting students

[Learning Strategies Center](#) (LSC): LSC staff can provide resources and support to students to help them become more successful and independent learners.