Ease Learning's DEI Rubric for **Equitable Course Design**

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DEI Rubric for Equitable Course Design

Bringing Continuous Improvement to DEI

We think differently. We always have. So, when we began to think about developing a rubric for equitable course design it's not surprising that we thought about it differently than others might. We strongly believe that diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) cannot exist if best practices are not embedded into the design process. This is especially true for online programs.

Online learning gets a bad rap. There is a monolithic view of online learning. Online learning does not mean an experience is exclusively Zoom learning or video lectures. It should be developed with DEI considerations and best practices in the design phase and with a qualified team of people doing the design work alongside qualified content experts. Elements such as mode, time, pace, rigor, types of experiences and Universal Design as well as applying a rubric like what we are sharing here, can ensure online learning can actually be richer than a face-to-face experience; more inclusive and have a reach that truly invites diversity and also changes the perception, value and reputation of online learning.

At Ease Learning, we embrace continuous improvement. It's built into our design process and into everything we do. We have approached this rubric with the same lens. In developing this rubric, we are not, by any means, saying that this is all-inclusive, with no room for improvement. This is a starting point and with our mindset of continuous improvement, we acknowledge that there may be areas that we have missed that should be included. What we have attempted to do is dig deep and look internally at areas within our own processes at Ease Learning where we could and should be leading with DEI as it pertains to best practices in course design.

There are a lot of organizations who have done great work in this area. We have looked at rubrics developed by these groups however, we feel that there are elements to our rubric that are very specific to how we are thinking about DEI. By including these areas, it is our intention to push others to think differently about these criteria than they might typically. Some of the

elements may be new to your thinking and for those that are familiar to you, again, we ask you to think about them critically and differently. These rubric criteria include:

- Integrator vs. Creator (inspired by [the work of Michael Wesch](#))
- The Feedback Section
- Accommodations
- Multiple Intelligences
- Collaboration
- The entire section on Analysis/Differentiation
- Scaffolding
- Grading

And in the vein of embracing continuous improvement and considering what the next revision of this rubric will look like, we encourage feedback. How do you react to what we are sharing, are you looking at these or other areas in different ways that also impact DEI? This information is too important not to share with the community at large. We know this first publication of our rubric is not without limits, we know there is more to do in this area, but the societal impact of addressing DEI is too great, we must begin to take action. We cannot wait for perfection.

How to Use This Rubric

We recommend you use the rubric in the following way when you are creating a new program/courses:

- Pair a learning designer with faculty - the goal is to create learning the way learners need to learn - not how we are comfortable teaching or DEI is lost.
- Use the rubric during design.
- Start with a framework - think BIG, then scale good practice consistently
- Adopt a continuous improvement approach to refine, enhance, and identify new opportunities to build DEI in your programs. This is a mindset shift. Let the data be the voice of the learners and be prepared to respond.

Key Rubric Areas
The rubric below identifies criteria in **four key areas** that we believe are crucial to equitable learning experience design:

- **Outcomes and Skills/Mapping (dark orange)**
- **Learning Path (dark green)**
- **Demonstration, Measurement, Feedback (dark blue)**
- **Analysis/Differentiated Instruction (dark purple)**

We very often hear about struggles to make online learning "engaging." Engagement is achieved when all the **participants are given a voice.** We provide ample opportunities for learners to not only receive content but also to be co-creators of content as they actively engage with content, one another, and their instructors. These critical elements allow all voices to be present. Active, experiential approaches to learning tap into learners' prior knowledge and are the underpinning of inclusion. DEI simply does not exist without active, student-centered learning. Learners use their voices when they can demonstrate their capabilities, preferences, strengths, and weaknesses in a quantifiable way. It is essential to allow them to synthesize new information and make it their own. It is our job to ensure the environment is set up to bring all voices into our designs.

The book "Equity By Design" states it well, *"if students are only ever taught how to follow directions, take orders and follow along, they will never be creators and thinkers, makers and writers. They will never learn the power of their own identity, their own thinking and their own voice. They will be governed by those who continue to have power and privilege and make the rules."* This is why thinking BIG is so important! Look for the 📣 (megaphone) icon throughout the rubric indicating where voice is central to foster diversity of perspectives and a true sense of inclusion.

Before you get started with using this rubric, we want to share this last thought. The rubric and DEI itself, should not be an afterthought. The rubric is most valuable when it is used to help conceptualize DEI along the way. It's critical that DEI is thought of intentionally and not tokenized. It should not be relegated to being thought of in hindsight or just a nice to have. It bears repeating; DEI must be thought of intentionally, from the start, and in a way that supports continuously improving upon the effort. This is what we intended when we developed this rubric. It is how best practice allows there to be inclusion and equity as a major tenant, not an afterthought.

To learn more about Ease Learning or to share your thoughts, feedback, or ideas for improvement on this rubric contact us today.

Outcomes and Skills/Mapping
Identify diverse learners and create personas; set high expectations and goals; align and scaffold learning to promote equitable access to successful outcomes (backward design).

Criteria	Meeting	Approaching	Not Evident	Design for DEI: Recommendations (Filled out by rubric user)
Learner Personas (Framework)	Diverse learner personas are documented in the framework, and program outcomes are aligned to personas allowing equitable access to outcome achievement.	Diverse learner profiles are documented in the program framework but are not aligned to outcomes; equitable access to outcome achievement is unclear.	Diverse learner personas are not considered in the program framework; equitable outcome achievement is at risk.	
Commitment to DEI For All Learner Personas (Framework)	Evidence exists of a commitment to DEI for all learner personas throughout the program framework allowing equitable access to outcome achievement.	Some evidence exists of a commitment to DEI for all learner personas throughout the program framework allowing equitable access to outcome achievement.	No evidence exists of a commitment to DEI for all learner personas throughout the program framework; equitable outcome achievement is at risk.	

Outcomes and Skills/Mapping
Identify diverse learners and create personas; set high expectations and goals; align and scaffold learning to promote equitable access to successful outcomes (backward design).

Criteria	Meeting	Approaching	Not Evident	Design for DEI: Recommendations (Filled out by rubric user)
Program/Course Outcomes and Skills (Framework)	Program outcomes and skills are measurable, stated clearly, and mapped to course outcomes and skills in the program framework ensuring equitable access to outcome achievement.	Program outcomes and skills as well as course outcomes and skills are stated in the program framework but are not mapped toward achieving equitable access to outcomes.	Program outcomes or course outcomes and skills are not stated in the program framework; equitable outcome achievement is at risk.	
Learning Outcomes and Skills (Course)	Learning outcomes and skills for all assessments are actionable, measurable, and mapped to course- and program-level outcomes and skills ensuring equitable access to outcome achievement.	Some learning outcomes and skills are actionable, measurable, and mapped to course- and program-level outcomes and skills, but actionability, measurability, and mapping need additional clarification to achieve equitable access to outcomes.	Learning outcomes and skills are not measurable and actionable, and are not mapped; equitable outcome achievement is at risk.	
Content and Activities Mapping	Course content, and activities are mapped to	Course content, and activities are sometimes	Course content, and activities are not mapped to	

Outcomes and Skills/Mapping
Identify diverse learners and create personas; set high expectations and goals; align and scaffold learning to promote equitable access to successful outcomes (backward design).

Criteria	Meeting	Approaching	Not Evident	Design for DEI: Recommendations (Filled out by rubric user)
(Course)	learning outcomes and skills ensuring equitable access to outcome achievement.	mapped to learning outcomes and skills but need additional alignment to achieve equitable access to outcomes.	learning outcomes and skills; equitable outcome achievement is at risk.	

Learning Path
Create experiences for all learners that provide opportunities to synthesize new concepts.

Criteria	Present	Developing	Needs Improvement	Design for DEI: Recommendations (Filled out by rubric user)
Prior Knowledge	Experiences evoke learners' prior knowledge and history and provide ample opportunities for learners to integrate new concepts and information with prior knowledge and experience.	Experiences somewhat evoke learners' prior knowledge and history, and some opportunities are provided for learners to integrate new concepts and information with prior knowledge and experience.	Experiences are not inclusive of learners' prior knowledge and history.	

Learning Path
Create experiences for all learners that provide opportunities to synthesize new concepts.

Criteria	Present	Developing	Needs Improvement	Design for DEI: Recommendations (Filled out by rubric user)
Integrator vs. Creator 📣	Diverse learners are given ample opportunities to create and share, as well as process and synthesize new concepts.	Learners are given some opportunities to create and share, as well as process and synthesize new concepts.	Learners are not given opportunities to create and share, as well as process and synthesize new concepts.	
Tone	Language intentionally sets a tone that fosters mutual respect; instructor models this for learners and facilitates this tone in all communications and written content.	Language does not set a tone that intentionally fosters, nor does it inhibit, mutual respect.	Language does not set a tone that fosters mutual respect.	
Environment for Diverse Voices 📣	Instructor fosters a safe space for learners to share ideas; ample opportunities to share varied perspectives exist for all participants.	Instructor does not intentionally create, nor inhibit a safe space for learners to share their ideas; some opportunities to share varied perspectives exist for all participants.	Instructor does not create a safe space for learners to share their ideas; no opportunities to share varied perspectives exist for all participants.	
Clear Inclusive Instructions	Expectations and organizational supports (written instructions, iconography, navigation	Expectations and organizational supports are sometimes present to support equitable	Expectations and organizational supports are hard to find or are not present.	

				Learning Path	

Learning Path
Create experiences for all learners that provide opportunities to synthesize new concepts.

Criteria	Present	Developing	Needs Improvement	Design for DEI: Recommendations (Filled out by rubric user)
	tools, orientations, etc.) are abundant, clearly stated, and can be accessed in various modes to support equitable achievement of outcomes.	achievement of successful outcomes.		
Accessibility of Materials	Course tools and technologies align to WCAG 2.1 at the AA level of accessibility guidelines.	Course tools and technologies align to WCAG 2.1 at the A level of accessibility guidelines.	Course tools and technologies do not align to WCAG 2.1 at the A level of accessibility guidelines. Accommodations are made at the individual student level.	
Learning Experience Design	The environment (LMS, tools, and technologies) is structured and implemented in a consistent, intuitive manner to reduce learners' cognitive load and optimize learning to support equitable outcome achievement.	The environment (LMS, tools, and technologies) is not always structured and implemented in a consistent manner; learners' cognitive load is not consistently reduced; equitable outcome achievement may be possible in some cases.	The environment (LMS, tools, and technologies) is structured and implemented in an inconsistent manner creating confusion for the learner and reducing equitable outcome achievement in most cases.	

Learning Path Create experiences for all learners that provide opportunities to synthesize new concepts.				
Criteria	**Present**	**Developing**	**Needs Improvement**	**Design for DEI: Recommendations (Filled out by rubric user)**
Mixed Modes of Media (UDL)	Various modes of interactive learning objects (ILOs) are utilized to support learner engagement and choice.	Some variation in modes of interactive learning objects (ILOs) are utilized to support learner engagement, but choice is limited.	No interactive learning objects nor variation of modes are used in the course.	
Inclusive Blend of Imagery and References	Images and examples across the course promote inclusion and offer varied racial, gender, age, and cultural identities that learners can relate to.	Images and examples across the course are somewhat inclusive and offer some varied racial, gender, age, and cultural identities or course references are neutral; learners can identify with some references.	Imagery is nonexistent or noninclusive and references are not relatable to many learners.	
Authenticity and Relevance	Experiences are crafted to be relevant to diverse learner personas identified and documented in the framework; experiences provide authentic application and context aligned with outcomes and skills.	Experiences are crafted to be somewhat relevant to diverse learner personas identified; experiences provide some authentic application and context aligned with outcomes and skills.	Learner personas do not relate to the authentic experiences and/or experiences are not authentic.	

Learning Path Create experiences for all learners that provide opportunities to synthesize new concepts.				
Criteria	**Present**	**Developing**	**Needs Improvement**	**Design for DEI: Recommendations (Filled out by rubric user)**
Multiple Pathways to Success	Experiences are created with an awareness of differentiated needs and support diverse learners through a multitude of approaches and various pathways to success.	Experiences are created with some sensitivity to differentiated needs and provide some alternate approaches and pathways to success.	Experiences exhibit a one-size-fits-all approach, lacking sensitivity to differentiated needs and diverse pathways to success.	
Open Educational Resources (OER)	Use of relevant and diverse open educational resources (OER) has been maximized to provide free or low-cost learner access and promote diverse perspectives.	Use of relevant and diverse open educational resources (OER) are sometimes used to provide free or low-cost learner access and promote diverse perspectives.	Use of relevant and diverse open educational resources (OER) is not evident; learner cost that may prohibit access has not been considered; diversity of perspectives could be at risk.	

Demonstration, Measurement, Feedback
Engage each learner to use their voice to demonstrate capabilities; measure outcomes and skills; foster iterative opportunities for application of feedback.

Criteria	Present	Developing	Needs Improvement	Design for DEI: Recommendations (Filled out by rubric user)
Collaboration 📣	Many opportunities are present for learners to engage one another, share ideas, and collectively problem-solve in a safe space; many opportunities for varied roles within collaborative situations have been created, and frequent instances of modeling respectful interaction and openness to varied perspectives are present.	Some opportunities are present for learners to engage one another, share ideas, and collectively problem-solve in a safe space; Some opportunities for varied roles within collaborative situations have been created, and some instances of modeling respectful interaction and openness to varied perspectives are present.	No opportunities are present for learners to engage one another, share ideas, or collectively problem-solve in a safe space. No opportunities for varied roles within collaborative situations have been created, and no instances of modeling respectful interaction and openness to varied perspectives are present.	
Multiple Intelligences 📣	Learners are provided with choice in the ways they demonstrate their learning and skills and are given varied types of activities that appeal to diverse learners.	Learners are sometimes provided with choice in the ways they demonstrate their learning and skills and are given some types of activities that appeal to diverse learners.	Learners are provided with only one way to demonstrate their learning and skills, and activities are not varied to appeal to diverse learners.	
Integrator vs. Creator 📣	Learners have ample opportunities to	Learners have some opportunities to	Learners have no opportunities to	

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Demonstration, Measurement, Feedback
Engage each learner to use their voice to demonstrate capabilities; measure outcomes and skills; foster iterative opportunities for application of feedback.

Criteria	Present	Developing	Needs Improvement	Design for DEI: Recommendations (Filled out by rubric user)
	demonstrate their knowledge and skills by presenting their ideas and thoughts and by providing feedback to others, thus integrating and creating ideas as well as reflecting on, probing, and synthesizing new knowledge.	demonstrate knowledge and skills by presenting their ideas and providing feedback to others, thus integrating and creating new learning.	demonstrate synthesis of knowledge through the presentation of their own ideas or by providing feedback to others, thus limiting integration of new knowledge and the creation of new learning.	
Diversity of Content	Content is conveyed in multiple ways (written, auditory, visual) to support engagement and learning styles of diverse learners; a broad range of course materials with inclusive perspectives are chosen, and the rationale for such choices are made clear.	Content is sometimes conveyed in multiple ways (written, auditory, visual) to support engagement and learning styles of diverse learners; course materials include some varying perspectives, and rationale is sometimes provided.	Content is rarely conveyed in multiple ways (written, auditory, visual) learning styles of diverse learners are not overtly considered; course materials do not contain multiple perspectives or present a rationale for being chosen.	
Accommodations 📢	Accommodations for learners are part of the design approach with	Accommodations for learners are part of the design approach with some	Accommodations for learners are not offered or	

Demonstration, Measurement, Feedback Engage each learner to use their voice to demonstrate capabilities; measure outcomes and skills; foster iterative opportunities for application of feedback.				
Criteria	**Present**	**Developing**	**Needs Improvement**	**Design for DEI: Recommendations (Filled out by rubric user)**
	methods documented; course policies support learners who need accommodations, and necessary accommodations are an ongoing conversation between learner and instructor, adapted as needed.	options documented; course policies somewhat support learners who need accommodations, but further opportunities for conversations and adaptations are needed.	are not a match for the needs of the learner.	
Feedback Loops 📢	The course is designed with multiple consistent feedback loops: instructor to learner, learner to instructor, and learner to learner; learners are provided multiple opportunities to give, receive, and apply feedback to and from instructor and peers.	There are some opportunities for feedback in the course from instructor to learner, learner to instructor, and learner to learner; however, feedback loops have not been well-integrated and may not be consistently utilized.	There is limited opportunity for instructor to learner, learner to instructor, and learner to learner feedback; formal feedback loops are not integrated, and feedback happens only informally.	
Feedback: Instructor to Learner 📢	Instructor-to-learner feedback gives credence to the individual learner's	Instructor-to-learner feedback does not inhibit the individual learners'	Instructor-to-learner feedback does not give credence to the individual	

Demonstration, Measurement, Feedback
Engage each learner to use their voice to demonstrate capabilities; measure outcomes and skills; foster iterative opportunities for application of feedback.

Criteria	Present	Developing	Needs Improvement	Design for DEI: Recommendations (Filled out by rubric user)
	perspective and prior knowledge and aims to build upon it; learners are given multiple opportunities to apply feedback in low-stakes, formative tasks.	perspective, nor does it prevent the learner's ability to build on prior knowledge; learners are given some opportunities to apply feedback in low-stakes, formative tasks.	learner's perspective and prior knowledge, nor does it aim to build upon learner's prior knowledge; opportunities for learners to apply feedback in low-stakes, formative tasks are minimal.	
Feedback: Learner to Instructor 📣	Learners are given multiple means and opportunities to provide feedback to instructors; methods exist for instructors to evaluate feedback and apply it to improve course content and instructional approach.	Learners are given some opportunities to provide feedback to instructors; some methods exist for instructors to apply learner feedback to improve course content and instructional approach.	Learners are not given opportunities and/or are not encouraged to provide feedback to instructors; no methods exist for instructors to apply learner feedback to improve course content and instructional approach.	
Feedback: Learner to Learner 📣	Learners are given multiple means and opportunities to provide feedback to one another; learners are given multiple opportunities to	Learners are given some opportunities to provide feedback to one another; learners are given some opportunities to apply	Learners have few opportunities to provide feedback to one another.	

Demonstration, Measurement, Feedback
Engage each learner to use their voice to demonstrate capabilities; measure outcomes and skills; foster iterative opportunities for application of feedback.

Criteria	Present	Developing	Needs Improvement	Design for DEI: Recommendations (Filled out by rubric user)
	apply feedback in low-stakes, formative tasks.	feedback in low-stakes, formative tasks.		
Differentiation and Scaffolding Grading	Course has a system of low-stakes assessments or flexible grading; multiple formative tasks offer opportunities for multiple rounds of feedback application or opportunities to retake assessments; scaffolding positions grading to focus on summative analysis and allows practice without punitive outcomes.	Course has a system of low-stakes assessments and some opportunities for flexible grading, but assessments don't scaffold in a way that allows multiple opportunities for feedback application, resulting in punitive outcomes.	Course has limited options for flexible grading and formative assessments; learners have limited opportunity for feedback application; focus is on high-stakes assessment. Grading has a punitive effect.	
Rubrics	Rubrics are created for each activity with clear expectations, guidelines, and criteria; exemplars provided to help remove unintended bias.	Some rubrics are created for course activities or grading expectations are provided.	Rubrics and grading expectations are not clearly available to learners.	

Demonstration, Measurement, Feedback
Engage each learner to use their voice to demonstrate capabilities; measure outcomes and skills; foster iterative opportunities for application of feedback.

Criteria	Present	Developing	Needs Improvement	Design for DEI: Recommendations (Filled out by rubric user)
Formative Assessments 📢	All summative tasks are preceded by multiple formative tasks that scaffold to the final assessment, allowing for multiple rounds of feedback application; instructor and peer feedback is provided at many points in the process; learners can integrate the feedback before summative tasks are scored.	Some summative tasks are preceded by formative tasks that allow for practice and feedback, formative tasks sometimes scaffold to summative assessments, but learners do not have ample opportunity to apply multiple rounds of feedback prior to scoring of summative tasks.	Course contains formative tasks, but they do not scaffold to the summative assessment; or course grade is largely dependent upon a single summative assessment.	

Analysis/Differentiated Instruction (Facilitation)
Integrated continuous improvement is enabled when data points across various levels of learning, tracking emergence of skills and outcomes are illuminated, gaps are disclosed, and trends can be identified.

Criteria	Exemplary	Present	Developing	Design for DEI: Recommendations (Filled out by rubric user)
Trends and Patterns	Frequent, ongoing review of qualitative and quantitative data is gathered in real time to summarize vulnerabilities and document actionable next steps to serve diverse learners.	Qualitative and quantitative data is gathered infrequently or only once at the end of the course, preventing timely actionable steps that would serve diverse learners.	Qualitative and quantitative data is not reviewed.	
Interventions	A multitude of intervention strategies are deployed in an ongoing way to assist and support learners in response to the live-data indicators in real time.	Intervention strategies are deployed to learners at times but not in an on-going way.	Interventions to support learners are not deployed.	
Design Updates	A methodology of integrated continuous improvement is prevalent in a partnership with designers and instructors where the data is used to inform course and/or program updates in	Data is used to update some aspects of a program/course but not in partnership with a learning designer or in an on-going way. DEI and overall student achievement is not a real-time primary focus.	Continuous Improvement is not implemented.	

Analysis/Differentiated Instruction (Facilitation)
Integrated continuous improvement is enabled when data points across various levels of learning, tracking emergence of skills and outcomes are illuminated, gaps are disclosed, and trends can be identified.

	response to DEI and overall student achievement.			
Learner Feedback 📣	Diverse learner feedback is encouraged and gathered in an ongoing way (ie. surveys, conversations) to further include learners' voices and learners' investment in their own learning journey.	Learner feedback is encouraged and collected a few times during the course but not in an on-going way or is not applied in a way that encourages learners to invest in their own learning journey.	There are no opportunities for learner feedback.	
Learner Access to Data 📣	Learners are provided access to their own data and progress toward outcomes, goals, and their emerging skills, and are guided in how to interpret the data, thus encouraging ownership of learner capabilities and direction.	Learners have access to their data but there is no clearly communicated plan on how to use that data to support ownership of learning capabilities.	Learners do not have access to their own data.	
Learner Ownership of Learning 📣	Learners are asked to use their data to analyze how they learn and support self-regulation; each learner creates a learning plan in which they set goals and develop a schedule to	Learners have access to their data, but there is no clear direction on how to use the data to support self-regulation and progress toward achieving course outcomes. Students are not	Learners do not have access to their data and progress.	

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Analysis/Differentiated Instruction (Facilitation)				
Integrated continuous improvement is enabled when data points across various levels of learning, tracking emergence of skills and outcomes are illuminated, gaps are disclosed, and trends can be identified.				
	support their progress toward achieving course outcomes; they discuss the plan with the instructor.	asked to create a learning plan.		

References

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