



Create a welcoming environment

Creating welcoming classroom and departmental environments—both physical and virtual—fosters a sense of belonging and safety that supports student engagement and success. Inclusive, thoughtfully designed spaces signal to students that they are valued members of the community and encourage active participation, collaboration, and connection.

To foster a welcoming departmental environment overall, consider:

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1. Educating students and faculty about topics such as how small, daily interactions either support or discourage people from pursuing computing.
 2. Implementing a code of conduct and allowing students to help co-create shared agreements.
 3. Holding events to encourage informal interactions among students and between students and faculty (e.g., social hours, hackathons).
 4. Helping students connect with each other, faculty, and industry representatives through mentoring and networking programs.
 5. Assisting new students with getting to know each other with learning communities, cohort programs, or a first-year course.
 6. Sharing and publicizing student and faculty work (e.g., with posters, newsletters, the program's website, and awards).
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When designing or decorating physical spaces, consider:

1. Incorporating neutral, widely appealing décor (e.g., plants, art, and nature images) to create an inviting atmosphere rather than décor that evokes narrow stereotypes of computing—such as overtly “geeky” imagery or objects.
2. Intentionally arranging spaces to encourage interaction, collaboration, and accessibility for all students.
3. Using remodels or relocations as opportunities to rethink and redesign spaces with inclusivity in mind.
4. Exploring funding options such as grants, corporate donations, or shared resources with other departments to enhance common spaces.
5. Making low-cost changes like adding appealing seating or student-contributed artwork and photographs to increase comfort and community connection.

Students are increasingly interacting in virtual spaces (e.g., on discussion boards; in chat during online class sessions; in Discord channels that may be topic- or class-specific, or department-wide). Utilizing platforms such as discussion boards, class chat, or Discord channels can build community and support connections among students, particularly for those reluctant to speak up in in-person settings, but virtual spaces also have their own challenges where students might be more likely than in-person to state negative comments.

When utilizing and designing virtual spaces, consider:

1. Creating clear, accessible guidelines for respectful and inclusive online interactions that are aligned with institutional policies.
2. Making it easy for students to report infractions or concerns to maintain a safe and welcoming environment.
3. Partnering with TAs or student monitors to help uphold community standards and foster positive engagement.
4. Putting engagement practices in place in virtual classroom spaces to ensure students maintain engagement in the virtual environment.