



FOUR STEPS TO AVOID DEFICIT THINKING

Students arrive on campus with different backgrounds and a diversity of lived experiences, which may create challenges in responding to the demands of higher education (Ormand, 2019; Smit 2012). It is easy for instructors to assume that students who do not succeed in higher education fail because of some internal weaknesses (Davis & Museums, 2019; Smit, 2012). It is this assumption that gives rise to [deficit thinking](#) in contemporary educational practices. The suggestions below provide strategies that will help you challenge your own deficit thinking and integrate a more strengths-based approach into your course activities.

Reframe Your Own Deficit Thinking

Consider your own attitudes or “cultural lens” towards students and strive to minimize negative impacts of deficit thinking. This practice can include committing to internal reflections and avoiding the use of “loaded” language that is highly emotional, subjective, biased, or stereotyping. This [article](#) provides ways to recognize unconscious bias and strategies to address it.



Foster Growth Mindset.

Repeatedly highlighting students’ weaknesses increases the risk of self-fulfilling prophecies of defeat and may lead students to withdraw from the institution (William et al., 2018). In contrast, a growth mindset creates opportunities for students to develop their strengths and reach their full potential, helping students feel a sense of belonging (Dweck, 2016). Check out our resource on four practical strategies that can [foster growth mindset](#).



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TEACHING & LEARNING INNOVATION

Incorporate Equity-Based Teaching

In order to promote an equitable learning experience, instructors should ensure that all students have equal access during the learning process to become critical thinkers. This [checklist](#) provides ways to support equitable classroom practices. For a more extensive introduction to inclusive teaching, check out resources in this [Inclusive Teaching Toolbox](#).



Incorporate Strength-Based Teaching

One way to avoid deficit thinking is identifying students' strengths (or have them identify their own strengths) and recognizing how those strengths contribute to academic achievement and well-being. [This TLI resource](#) provides strategies for using students' strengths in the classroom. In addition to combatting deficit thinking, strengths-based teaching helps increase equity in the classroom.