Creating Accountable Spaces

1. Being mindful of how we take or give up space

For those who naturally step forward in sharing, look for opportunities to lead in different ways- listen for understanding, ask questions and encourage the contributions of others. For those prone to self-silence, remember that our learning process thrives off different and unique perspectives.

2. Being conscious of power and privilege

When we hold power in a space- whether due to our formal positioning or our social location- we can impact dynamics in both overt and subtle ways, influencing both who feels comfortable speaking and the perspectives they are willing to share. Being mindful of this positioning and how it's used can foster more critical and meaningful engagement.

3. Being accountable for impact

When we discriminate, make generalizations or assumptions about people based on any aspect of our social positioning, we support oppressive social structures.

Intent is not the same as impact and we can do harm even when we don't mean to. But addressing harm doesn't need to be fraught. Instead, we can:

- o Let community members know when harm is done (*Ouch!/That sounds like a generalization/I'm uncomfortable with that term..*)
- o Look for opportunities to 'call in' and take advantage of teachable moments. Not sure what 'call-in' means? Read the following: Interrupting Bias: Calling Out Versus Calling In
- o Show accountability when we've made a mistake (*Thanks for letting me know/I can see why that's a problem and I appreciate you sharing with me/I'm sorry..*)
- o Move forward

4. Practicing humility

We're all learners, we all have gaps in our understanding and we're all capable of making mistakes or causing harm. While we hold ourselves and others accountable in this space, doing so with grace and humility will create opportunities for all of us to learn and grow from mistakes, rather than be defined by them.

5. Embracing discomfort

Discomfort and friction are signs that we are being tested with new experiences, perspectives or opportunities for growth. By identifying the differences, we can create productive safeguards that leave room for healthy challenge. Watch the following video to learn more about Unsafe vs Uncomfortable: Understanding the Difference

6. Sharing our own story, not speaking for or defining others

Personal experiences add a critical layer to dialogue, but let's not share stories or experiences that aren't ours to share or expect members of marginalized communities to speak as representatives of those communities.

Let's avoid assumptions and generalizations about other people's identities and ways of being in the world. Let's create opportunities and norms for self-identification (sharing pronouns along with names).

7. Lessons leave, stories stay

Let's be mindful of the trust placed in the community when members show vulnerability and share personal narratives. We honor this trust by keeping these stories in the space.

8. Listening to learn

While proving a point can feel validating, when we shift from debate to dialogue we create learning opportunities that are richer and more sustainable. This happens when we:

- o **Speak from our own perspective** (use "I" statements)
- o **Suspend judgment** (be open to the possibility that our knowledge is incomplete, and that there's value in understanding the perspectives, experiences and rationale that ground even the opinions we disagree with)
- o **Challenge assumptions** (by exploring our own biases we create room for real learning)
- o **Listen** to understand, not to refute
- o **Be curious!** (questions help all parties explore, examine, and reflect)

9. Practicing self-care (and knowing when we need it)

Accountable spaces are rooted in the principle of mindful communication, but no collective measure can account for or prevent every unique personal trigger. We show accountability to ourselves and others by Identifying Our Own Triggers, asking for support or space when we need it and being accountable for how we engage and respond to others.

10. Showing real investment

Performing social consciousness does little to support real learning. Instead, we can show authentic investment by what we're willing to give up: our time (to do our own learning and work) our comfort (showing vulnerability) or aspects of our self-image (acknowledging and learning from mistakes). These forms of long-term investment build trust and sustainable change.

These guidelines draw on accountable space principles as outlined by Elise Ahenkorah, the University of Michigan's Discussion Guidelines, and other open access community agreements, thoughtfully shared as resources by groups such as University of Alberta's Access and Disability Justice and Reading Group and UC Santa Cruz Student Union Assembly.