

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in Teaching Physics

March 2021 Bulletin: Impostor Syndrome

Impostor syndrome takes the form of feelings of inadequacy and fear of being exposed for not belonging

Impostor syndrome preferentially affects underrepresented students, and can be a major reason for early termination of a person's pursuit of physics

How can you help?

- **Be specific with positive feedback** and acknowledge a student's effort
- **Foster a growth mindset** by noting that success in physics stems from effort and persistence rather than innate ability or previous opportunities
- **Encourage engagement outside of the classroom** with clubs (like SPS/VIIP/SEDS) and research (even as beginners!) to promote a sense of belonging

How does impostor syndrome affect members of your classroom?

- Students may feel afraid to ask questions in class, attend office hours, or connect with mentors and peers
- Undergraduates may be discouraged from engaging in research and seeking extracurricular opportunities
- Pressures of perfectionism and fear of failure may keep students from pursuing careers in physics

"The stigmatization and self-doubt experienced by members of ethnic and racial groups that have been minoritized and marginalized is exacerbated by their underrepresentation in physics."

- Geraldine Cochrane, 2018

There are many ways to learn more

- Look to the Diversity & Student Success office for workshops and strategies
- Visit <https://underrep.com> for lessons to incorporate discussions of impostor syndrome in a classroom
- Read the AAS January 2011 [STATUS report](#)

Links and archive: go.unc.edu/uncpa-dei-bulletin