

Equalize classroom performance by acknowledging stereotype threat  
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Despite money, policy and effort aimed at eliminating bias in the educational systems of the United States, as groups, minority students still have high drop-out rates and lower grade-point averages and test scores; women poorer than men on math tests and better than men in verbal skills. These long-standing differences demand an explanation, and Toni Schmader, associate professor of psychology at the University of Arizona, provided a succinct and well-documented clarification during a recent visit to NDSU.

Schmader is an internationally recognized scholar of social stigma, prejudice and intergroup relations. In one of her May 8 presentations, titled "No stigmatized child left behind: Understanding and reducing the effects that stereotypes have on academic performance," she reviewed current and historical research about how stereotypical assumptions about race and gender impact learners and how the threat and impact of such stereotypes can be mitigated.

Stereotype threat means members of stigmatized groups feel an added pressure to perform well to avoid confirming negative stereotypes about their group. Research also shows that the added pressure impairs performance on cognitively complex tasks. Schmader and her colleagues in the social sciences have conclusively demonstrated that stereotype threats affect performance and they can be overcome with only a little effort on the part of a teacher.

Strategies that appear to reduce stereotype threat include being told that the threat exists and taught to reappraise the situation, creating a sense of belongingness by letting students know that experiencing difficulty is normal and intelligence is incremental, and emphasizing skill over ability.

One NDSU psychology graduate student summarized Schmader's presentation, saying, "Belief in belonging matters."

The Advance FORWARD program funded Schmader's visit to NDSU. Evaluations of her presentations will help assess the impact of National Science Foundation advance funding as researchers explore and document the climate for women at NDSU, and if and how the National Science Foundation funded programming is changing that climate. About 50 faculty, staff and students attended the public lecture. More than 75 faculty and administrators attended a noon hour workshop on "The science of unconscious bias."

A video of the presentation and her handout will be posted on the FORWARD Web page, [www.ndsu.edu/forward](http://www.ndsu.edu/forward). Schmader also led afternoon sessions specifically designed for faculty or administrators.