When Hate Happens on Campus - Talking points for Faculty Discussion Guide

At predominantly White cishet Institutions, there are likely to be incidents targeting members of the University community based on their marginalized identity statuses and beliefs, which express hostility, derision, and violence. Some may be explicit threats, while others are more subtle, often minimized as a poor joke, unintentional, just an individual opinion, or a free speech issue. At times, symbols, dog whistles, and other referential materials could be used to send messages that those within White Christian Supremacy movements can hear but may be missed by unaware members of the community.

Students have confirmed repeatedly that they wish faculty to be active in addressing these topics in classrooms, and that ignoring the incidents seems like complicity. This can often be difficult for faculty who teach in subjects that do not seem to readily lend themselves to such discussions, or perceive themselves as not having the skills to facilitate such discussions. This guide is to assist you in both addressing events on campus that have occurred, as well as manage spontaneous discussions.

Structuring your classroom to predict and address events

- Expand your opening remarks to let students know everyone is welcome in your classroom. As a member of the faculty, you practice affirmation and denounce hate and prejudice. Your classroom will strive to be a place of mutual respect where the focus is on learning and student success.
- Underscore your commitment to diversity by making the classroom as welcoming as possible to all students. You can ensure free speech rights are fully respected and protected, while also focusing on the need for historically marginalized members to be welcomed.
- Check-in with your students on a regular basis. Share information about existing campus resources such as organizations and affinity groups, counseling services, and outlets for constructive free expression, as necessary. Share with peers in your department and college to discover their thoughts on how students are faring.
- Be mindful of your role in advocating for students, empowering them, assist them to problem-solve, and make spaces for the voices of students.
● Build community within your classroom that allows authentic and meaningful dialogue and conversations.
● Create a set of norms and ground rules for discussions that may be high intensity. Have students participate in creating the norms. Remind students when these seem forgotten or contravened.

What to do when an event occurs:

● Don’t wait too long. The first class meeting after an event has occurred, make a point to address it. This can involve raising the issue, describing what occurred in a summary for those students who may be unaware, and sharing your reaction. Invite any students who wish to do so, to comment and discuss the event, acknowledging that there are often multiple emotional reactions of exhaustion, threat, anger, anxiety, and numbness. Sometimes, more creative ways also work. Have students come up and draw on the whiteboard, creating a group mandala of sorts to represent their perspectives. When finished, invite folks to take a picture.
● If you have time and space, invite a structured longer discussion. If you do not, offer resources and referrals to student organizations, Ombuds, Wellness, relevant student communities, counseling and psychological services on campus, and invite students to use such services.
● If you know or are aware that there may be students who may be impacted, offer supportive options for completing assignments or work. Student life and work may be disrupted because they are engaged in advocacy work, which is inequitable if not recognized.
● Frame the conversation with some connection to the coursework. Offer resources that explore or address the ways that social issues around power and inequity are relevant.

Basic facilitation of difficult conversations:

1. Address ground rules and norms up front, reminding folks of the principles.
2. People own their voice and cannot be spoken for but are in charge of their own experience and how much of it they wish to share.
   “Please know that you have every right to pass in such a conversation, and you can take care of your own needs to share or not as you choose.”
3. No one carries the responsibility of serving as ambassador or representative for their entire affinity group.
   “As we have this conversation, anyone who wants to can speak. Just know that you don’t also have to carry the burden of speaking for all members of your group.”
4. When one is hurt and wounded, it is easy to strike out. If someone expresses sentiments that are hurtful to hear, validate their feelings and reframe the sentiment.

Student, “I am so sick and tired of you White people–just keep your mouth shut, can you do that?”

Faculty, “I hear how angry and frustrated and tired you are that we seem to keep having this conversation. I am so sorry. I want you to notice and look around at the actual people here, some of whom, while White, have been supportive of you. I’m not saying that White supremacy doesn’t exist, but you may be less alone than you feel right now.”

5. Allow silence if it is not punishing. If it is after someone has said something insightful or profound, take a long deep obvious breath to show you are contemplating. You might simply murmur, “Thank you.”

6. If many people want to talk and it’s getting heated and confrontational, pause the conversation, pass out index cards, and have people take a moment to write one emotional response, one thought, and one question. Then invite everyone to go around and read whatever they wish to share.

7. Remind folks that these are complex issues and they aren’t going to be solved or fixed in a single classroom discussion. Offer space in a course shell to continue the discussion. If some have a plan, affirm that, and invite them to take ownership of asking for assistance.

8. Take notes and afterwards, summarize the main themes of the conversation and share it with the class as a whole, in the course shell. Post resources to accompany.

Additional Resources:

https://crlt.umich.edu/publinks/respondingtobias

https://www.aaup.org/article/eight-actions-reduce-racism-college-classrooms#.Ymb0di-B3WY

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