



CHALLENGING CLASSROOM CONVERSATIONS A TOOL TO ACCELERATE LEARNING

Students across the nation are **engaged in activism** and sparking dialogue on a broad range of diversity issues from “local” issues of campus climate to larger global matters. It is likely that these issues will also be on the **minds of Matadors** as we welcome them to campus this fall. Adding the techniques below to your existing toolbox may help you **sharpen your effectiveness** while also promoting higher levels of student success.

Within intentionally crafted and managed **inclusive classrooms**, these moments of disequilibrium sparked by challenging classroom conversations can actually **promote cognitive growth**, academic achievement, and equip students with conflict resolution and diverse team work skills **essential for 21st century success**.¹ Here are some ideas on how you can navigate these moments.

1 Start each class and discussion with an objective.

Structure discussions so that there are clear guidelines regarding appropriate boundaries for the discussion (e.g., specific discussion topics). Write it down so it is transparent for everyone.

2 Go back to the ground rules.

During times of high emotion or conflict you may need to remind participants about the ground rules. The ground rules will help frame the mutual sharing of ideas in a respectful and responsible manner.²

3 Ask students if they have heard similar viewpoints expressed in society-at-large (e.g., in the media, etc.) and apply the course material using possible reasons behind the sentiment.

As part of encouraging the open exchange of ideas in the classroom, you may find an idea expressed that students in your class find offensive. By using the “similar viewpoints” technique you can protect students’ right to free speech and leverage the moment to help all your students analyze multiple viewpoints, think critically and sharpen their own oral communication skills.³

4 Connect discussions to “real-world” events that are meaningful to students.

Guide the discussion by intentionally relating students’ questions/comments back to the course content as it applies to “real-world” problems that are meaningful to your students. Application to “real world problems” is a high impact practice.⁴

5 Engage students in High Impact Practices [HIPs]; research with our own CSUN students shows it makes a positive difference.

CSUN freshman who participated in two or more High Impact Practices [HIPs] were more likely to graduate in a shorter period of time and with a higher GPA than peers who were not engaged in HIPs⁵. High impact practices include relating course content to “big real world questions,” exploring cultures, viewpoints, lived experiences reflecting the cultural complexity of our global community, engaging students in research, and more.

The tips above were curated & adapted with permission from The University of Michigan, Center for Research on Learning and Teaching² and Harvard University's Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning.³ Get more at <http://www.crlt.umich.edu> and <http://bokcenter.harvard.edu>



Learn more about these ideas.

For best practices from your CSUN colleagues try these resources:

- Professor Wendy L. Yost, Recreation & Tourism Management share tips for establishing expectations for collaborative work at <http://www.csun.edu/sites/default/files/Establishing-Expectations.pdf>
- Professors Whitney Scott and Frankie Augustin talk about how to help students navigate group work conflicts including strategies to prevent conflicts from occurring. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzpHwQEF1zc>

Your Chief Diversity, and Faculty Development Office colleagues create evidence-based tools, and curate best practices that are easy-to-implement, practical, powerful, customized for CSUN, all with the goal of supporting your success.

Look for more tips & tools in our next monthly installment of *5 Success Tips in 5 Minutes or Less*. We welcome your suggestions for next month's topic. **Please share your suggestions** by emailing us at cdo@csun.edu or Faculty Development facdev@csun.edu.

References:

¹Gurin, P., Dey, E.L., Hurtado, S., and Gurin, G. (2002). Diversity and Higher Education: Theory and Impact on Educational Outcomes, *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol 72(3), Fall 2002.

²Saunders, S., Kardia, D. (2004). Guidelines for discussion of racial conflict and the language of hate, bias, and discrimination/Creating inclusive classrooms. University of Michigan's Center for Research on Learning and Teaching. Retrieved from <http://www.crlt.umich.edu/publinks/racialguidelines.html>.

³Warren, L. (2000). Managing hot moments in the classroom. Harvard University's Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning. Retrieved from <http://sites.harvard.edu/fs/html/icb.topic58474/hotmoments.html>.

⁴Kuh, G.D. (2008). *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter* Association of American Colleges & Universities.

⁵Huber, B.J. (2010). Does participation in multiple high impact practices affect student success at Cal State Northridge? Some Preliminary Insights.