

Resources to Support Faculty in the Post-Charlottesville Classroom

As we welcome our new and returning students to CSUN, it is helpful to consider that many of our students (and colleagues, for that matter) from all disciplines will likely have been affected by the events in Charlottesville, VA and the responses across the country in the weeks that followed. CSUN faculty and staff from all over campus came together to provide this resource for faculty members as they navigate the parameters of freedom of speech and expression in the classroom (including online discussions), facilitate difficult dialogues, create an inclusive class environment beginning on the first day, support students who have experienced trauma, and practice self-care.

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What are the limits on and protections for free speech in the classroom?

"Students' right of free expression are not without limits in the classroom. The classroom is not an open forum and is therefore subject to reasonable speech regulation" ([California State University Handbook of Free Speech Issues](#), page 18).

Political and religious speech are protected categories of speech under both the California Constitution and the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. However, free speech is not absolute, and certain categories of speech are *not* entitled to First Amendment protection. Among them are speech that promotes actual violence or imminent harm to safety (also known as "incitement," which means that the speaker intended to incite others to commit imminent illegal action, i.e. violence), fighting words ("those by which their very utterance inflict injury or tend to incite an immediate breach of the peace"¹), true threats, expression that constitutes criminal or unlawful harassment, defamation, and obscenity.

If you encounter any of these types of expression in your class, here are the steps to follow:

- Always notify Campus Police at extension 2111 if a safety concern arises.
- Otherwise, give a warning to the student and allow them to correct the behavior.
- If the behavior persists, dismiss the student (the student should not be permitted to return to class until she/he meets with the Director of Student Conduct and Ethical Development, Sam Lingrosso).
- Notify your Department Chair of the incident.
- Notify Student Affairs at extension 2391 of the incident.

Hate speech is speech that attacks a person or group of people based on a group characteristic such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender identity, national origin, sexual orientation, or disability, and it is typically considered political speech. The U.S. Supreme Court so far has declined to add hate speech *per se* to the list of categories of speech that are excluded from First Amendment protection. Therefore, hate speech *per se* remains protected speech. However, speech that would otherwise be categorized as hate speech *would* be unprotected by the First Amendment if it *also* falls into one of the above categories of unprotected speech (e.g., incitement, true threats, etc.).

¹ Chaplinsky v. State of New Hampshire, 315 U.S. 568, 572 (1942)

The [California State University Handbook of Free Speech Issues](#) includes a passage that may provide some inspiration to faculty as they put together syllabi that provide guidelines around inclusive class discussions. According to the handbook:

student behavior that 'materially disrupts class work or involves substantial disorder or invasion of the rights of others is ... not immunized by the constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech.' Faculty are in charge of their classrooms and can expect students to comport themselves in a manner that is consistent with a healthy learning environment. If a student continues after fair warning to engage in disruptive behavior, it may be necessary to involve the Student Conduct Officer and pursue possible discipline (page 18).

CSUN's Office of Equity and Diversity provides [sample syllabus statements for respectful dialogues](#), which can be helpful in maintaining a respectful learning environment. Student Affairs at CSUN has put together a Guide for Faculty when it comes to [Responding to Disruptive or Threatening Student Behavior](#) that you may find helpful.

What if I want to acknowledge in my classes the critical incident that took place in Charlottesville, VA?

- Read "[The First Thing Teachers Should Do When School Starts Is Talk About Hatred In America. Here's Help,](#)" by Valerie Strauss (*Washington Post*, August 13, 2017).
- Read "[There Is No Apolitical Classroom: Resources For Teaching In These Times,](#)" (NCTE, August 15, 2017).
- Use this year's Freshman Common Reading, *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates, to connect the current social events to the author's lived experience and reflections on race in America. [Freshman Common Reading Resources for Faculty and Staff](#)
- Several CSUN faculty members have shared their own plans for acknowledging the current social climate, which include doing one or more of the following on the first day of class:
 - "I will share with my students how the incident made me feel (I've been reflecting and thinking about this and this is how I feel)."
 - "I will invite students to write about how the incident made them feel."
 - "I will invite students to discuss how the incident made them feel."
- Be aware that some students will expect class discussions to focus only on the course objectives. Be prepared to make a connection between a conversation about Charlottesville, VA and the course. Also, be prepared for the fact that, if the topic is not related to the course, some students may choose not to participate or may express an objection. It should be clear to students that they will be graded on their academic performance and not their personal point of view.

How do I facilitate difficult dialogues about the current social and political climate effectively?

The CSUN Office of Faculty Development has [resources for Navigating Difficult Dialogues](#). There are a number of frameworks for communicating when we find ourselves in a potential conflict due to a difference in point of view, perspective, or experience. One framework, known as LARA, is outlined below.

Step One: Listen

Make an effort to hear and show regard for the speaker.

- Listen to what the person is saying without trying to make meaning of it or think of how you'll respond while the person is still talking.
- Use empathy as your guiding principle to understand what lies beneath their words. Do their words and inflection reflect fear, frustration, or some other emotion?
- Pay attention to body language, both yours and the speaker's.

Step Two: Affirm

Positively re-state and confirm what the speaker said, inquiring into the specifics behind the person's comment. Affirming does not suggest agreement.

- I hear your point about...
- I understand how frustrating it can be when...
- What you're saying seems to relate to what your colleague just said...
- Could you say more about that?
- Can you give us an example of what you're saying?

Step Three: Respond

Engage others in the dialogue or share about yourself. You can use think-pair-share to get students to discuss in small groups before sharing out with the class.

- How do others relate to that comment?
- How do others feel about that?
- What do other folks think about that?
- I'm wondering what reactions other folks had...
- When I hear you say that I think/feel...
- I was socialized to believe...

Step Four: Add information

Add relevant facts, data, and information about context, potential impact of speaker's point of view on others, resources, or class materials, and explore solutions together. This step could lead into an assignment where students conduct further research on the topic as it relates to the course.

What could I do on the first day of class to create a learning environment that is inclusive of students from varying identity groups and viewpoints?

María del Carmen Salazar, Amanda Stone Norton, and Franklin Tuit present five practices for inclusive teaching: inclusive pedagogy, curricular transformation, intrapersonal awareness, interpersonal awareness, and inclusive teaching.² Each one is described briefly below, followed by three ideas to build an inclusive environment on the first day of class.

- **Inclusive Pedagogy:** Organizing course work that is meaningful, transparent, and invites collaboration, while monitoring student progress to provide timely interventions
- **Curricular Transformation:** Selecting course content and teaching in a way that is relevant to all my students
- **Intrapersonal Awareness:** Adopting a cultural humility approach that constantly examines how my ideas, assumptions and values influence my teaching approach and relationships
- **Interpersonal Awareness:** Connecting with students by understanding their perspective and amplifying their viewpoint to build authentic caring relationships
- **Inclusive Environment:** Promoting a sense of belonging by cultivating a shared-power, growth-mindset environment
 1. The importance of starting the semester with an **icebreaker** to begin to establish community among students, increase student sense of belong, and build connections between students and faculty cannot be understated, even in large classes. The Center for Teaching Excellence at Cornell University has [icebreaker resources](#) that may inspire you.
 2. Establishing **ground rules** at the beginning of the semester "sets the tone of a class, provides clear guidelines on how to behave, decreases instances of incivility, and enables students and faculty to feel safe expressing their ideas or points of view," according to Cornell University's Center for Teaching Excellence. The Center offers some [techniques for establishing and implementing classroom norms](#).
 3. One of the five components of a [Learning Centered Syllabus](#) is an inclusive and promising learning environment, which, among other things conveys acceptance of difference through an **inclusion statement** (or diversity statement). The Yale Center for Teaching and Learning has an [inclusion statement resource page](#) that offers ideas for all disciplines when it comes to adding an inclusion statement to the syllabus.

² Salazar, M., Norton, A. S., & Tuit, F. A. (2009). Weaving promising practices for inclusive excellence into the higher education classroom. In L. Nelson & J. Miller (Eds.), *To improve the academy: Resources for faculty, instructional, and organizational development* (pp. 208-226). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

How could I extend support to students who are experiencing trauma as a result of the events that occurred in Charlottesville, VA?

- Think about your students' indirect experience with the event as a result of social media and news coverage of the events that took place in Charlottesville, VA. According to [a psychological first aid resource for educators](#), common reactions to critical incidents "include trouble sleeping, problems at school and with friends, trouble concentrating and listening, and not finishing work or assignments" (page 4).
- Listen to your students and pay attention to verbal and non-verbal cues.
- Let students know they're not alone in their reactions to the event.
- Refer students to [University Counseling Services](#) at extension 2366, option 1.

How do I avoid burn-out, disconnection, or further trauma myself as a result of the events that occurred in Charlottesville, VA?

Border Crossers is a non-profit organization seeking racial justice in the classroom, and the organization compiled [resources for educators \(and parents\)](#). Below are links to some of the resources.

- [4 Self-Care Tips for People of Color after Charlottesville](#) by Lara Witt
- [4 Self-Care Resources for Days When the World is Terrible](#) by Miriam Zoila Perez
- [Self-Care for People of Color After Psychological Trauma](#), Just Jasmine
- [Resisting White Supremacy Can't Happen Without Self-Care](#) by Ebonye Gussine Wilkins
- [11 Ways Black People Can Practice Self-Care in the Wake of Trump's Win](#) by Zeba Blay

Additional Resources

- [Statement from CSUN President Dianne F. Harrison on Recent Events in Charlottesville, VA](#)
- [CSUN Civil Discourse & Social Change](#)
- [Oviatt Library Civil Rights and Civil Action Page](#)
- [Southern Poverty Law Center Campus Guide to Countering the Alt-Right](#)
- [Southern Poverty Law Center Ten Ways to Fight Hate](#)
- ["Addressing Passive Racism in the Academy," Inside Higher Ed](#)