



Start TALKING

A HANDBOOK FOR ENGAGING
DIFFICULT DIALOGUES
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

KAY LANDIS, EDITOR

UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA ANCHORAGE
ALASKA PACIFIC UNIVERSITY

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Produced in partnership by
The University of Alaska Anchorage
and Alaska Pacific University

Made possible through the generous support of the
Ford Foundation Difficult Dialogues Initiative



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Published by:

University of Alaska Anchorage
Fran Ulmer, Chancellor
3211 Providence Drive
Anchorage, AK 99508

Alaska Pacific University
Douglas North, President
4101 University Drive
Anchorage, AK 99508

A major source for this handbook is *Discussion as a Way of Teaching* (2nd Edition) by Stephen D. Brookfield and Stephen Preskill, copyright © 1999, 2005 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Quotations and techniques reprinted with permission of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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ISBN: 978-0-9702845-3-2

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INTRODUCTION

“Civil Discourse Under Fire”

You probably won't see the above words as a headline in your morning newspaper any time soon, but it's happening nonetheless. Civil discourse seems to be in trouble. The art of respectful argument and the effort to find mutual solutions seem to be losing ground. Our public debates on critical issues are filled with sound bites instead of substance, and our popular culture seems motivated more by the desire to dominate and win than by the commitment to learn, understand, seek common ground, or persuade.

There's trouble in the Academy too. Faculty members are challenged for bringing gender, religion, science, or politics into their classrooms. Students find themselves marginalized or even attacked for their world views or religious beliefs. Outbursts that aren't managed effectively can leave students feeling threatened and faculty feeling out of control, turning class discussions into emotionally or spiritually destructive experiences instead of the learning experiences they are meant to be.

Civil discourse is the cornerstone of the university experience, and our classrooms and laboratories are ideal venues for teaching it. As standard practice, we challenge our assumptions, question what we know, and seek new understanding rather than rigidly defending what we have developed in the past. In this process of inquiry, we rely on critical thinking, inclusiveness, tolerance, and respect to create new knowledge and reframe old tenets to the emerging world.

Universities show students how to transcend the boundaries of their own perceptions, and engage respectfully with new ideas. Now, as ever, this may be higher education's most important role. Now is the time, and our campuses are the place, to rebuild a culture of civil discourse.

In today's violent world, the expectations that university faculty carry into the classroom may seem outlandishly ideal. Against enormous odds, we still expect the classroom to be a safe place to think, probe, and argue about ideas. This expectation has been fostered over millennia, in times no less perilous—and many times even more so—than our own. It is a part of the university tradition that our best hope for understanding each other and for resolving our differences comes from the free exchange and exploration of ideas—new and received—in the Academy. The possibility for such freedom comes paradoxically from submitting to the discipline of the liberating arts. It falls to our watch, as to every other that has preceded ours, to protect these premises for civilized exchange.

Dr. Marilyn Barry
Academic Dean
Alaska Pacific University

Need for Faculty Development

By and large, university professors begin their faculty careers with fresh degrees and highly refined academic and research skills. We are content experts. We know our subjects; we can write about them, talk about them, research them, defend them. But most of us have spent very little time learning how to teach and virtually none preparing ourselves to deal effectively with controversy. Ask us what to do about the biblical literalist who challenges our teaching of evolution, the insensitive student who makes a racial slur, the conservative who complains about our liberal bias, the aggressive student in the front row who dominates the conversation, or the quiet one in the back who never says a word, and suddenly the room goes silent. What should we do when these things happen in our classrooms? Many of us don't really know.

Engagement is not built on students working in soup kitchens for academic credit, nor is it built on faculty members applying their expertise in the community as the basis for an academic paper. A truly engaged society begins when two people with vastly different life experiences sit down together, share their deepest thinking about the challenges facing our world, and are transformed as a result. As engaged universities, we must re-learn the tools of civil discourse in partnership with the generations that will build the future.

Dr. Michael A. Driscoll
Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic
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aggressive student in the front row who dominates the conversation, or the quiet one in the back who never says a word, and suddenly the room goes silent. What should we do when these things happen in our classrooms? Many of us don't really know.

The Project

With these issues foremost in our minds, leaders from two Alaska universities—Alaska Pacific University (APU) and the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA)—formed a partnership and designed a project to teach ourselves some new skills. Our goal was ambitious: to improve the learning climate on our campuses, making them more inclusive of minority voices and ways of knowing and safer places for the free exchange of ideas.

Although neighbors, we came from very different academic worlds. UAA is a

multi-campus public university—the largest in the state—with a mission that includes access, excellence, engagement, and diversity. APU is a small private university—once Methodist, now independent—with a mission emphasis on active learning and on nurturing spiritual and moral values consistent with its Christian heritage while respecting the religious convictions of all. The two universities sit side by side on a forested strip of land just east of midtown Anchorage, sharing a library and a magnificent view of the Chugach Mountains. But we also share a competitive and sometimes contentious history. In fact, let's be honest here. We didn't trust each other completely. But we thought: who knows? Maybe this time we *can* all just get along.

We dreamed together. A hand-picked group of us—professors, administrators, and staff—sat around a conference table in our shared library and played the “what if” game. What if we could train ourselves to handle controversy better? What if we could change the way we teach? What if we could really make our campuses more inclusive and safer places for learning?

For several weeks, these conversations were the highlight of our days: lively, full of big ideas and easy laughter. We discovered that, for all of our differences, we shared the same basic values and the same optimism and hopes. There was a problem. We could do something about it. It could be scary, but it could also be fun. We could make a difference.

The conversations led to a proposal, and the proposal led to a funding source. Early in 2006, the Ford Foundation awarded us a two-year grant as part of its national Difficult Dialogues initiative. Our project was one of twenty-six throughout the U.S. to be included in the initiative, a fact we traded on shamelessly in the coming months to garner additional support. The Ford Foundation name carries a lot of weight. We were part of something big.

Our central strategy was threefold: to train ourselves via a series of faculty intensives, to go out and teach differently for a year, and then to come back together to share what we had learned. We developed a curriculum for a week-long faculty intensive, designed a competitive application process, set up stipends for participants and expectations for what they should accomplish, and selected an initial cohort of thirty faculty members. We set aside two weeks in May, in between our commencements and the start of our summer terms, to hold the first two intensives back to back. We took a deep breath and got started.

Strategies

Faculty Fellowship Program

We invested about half of our grant money directly in our faculties by creating a fellowship program that paid stipends for project participation. We used a selective application process, choosing participants (Fellows) based on their experience, motivation, and capacity for advancing the cause. We consciously selected an interdisciplinary cohort that included both junior and seasoned professors.

A decorative graphic for the Faculty Fellowship section. It features a central circular emblem with a stylized human figure inside, surrounded by various symbols like a gear, a star, and a leaf. The text "Faculty Fellowship" is written in a bold, sans-serif font across the middle of the emblem.

Faculty Fellowship

A method of bringing faculty members together into a cohort to strengthen their skills, renew their purposes, and cultivate leaders.

Make it selective.

Use an application and interview process to select an engaged cohort with the potential to become mentors and leaders.

Mix it up.

Create as much diversity as you can. Actively recruit applicants from a variety of disciplines, ethnicities, cultures, and political persuasions.

Expect a lot.

Expect them to practice or achieve certain things and tell them clearly and often what those things are.

Reward them.

Value their time, experience, and creativity with recognition, respect, and stipends.

The thirty chosen Fellows came from two universities, three campuses, five schools, and eighteen disciplines. A few of them already knew each other well: the four English professors from UAA, for example, and all five professors from APU. Others knew each other only by reputation. Many were complete strangers who met each other for the first time around our conference table. It was the first time we knew of that APU and UAA faculty had sat down together at the same table with the same purpose.

The Fellowship required commitment. Each member would attend a week-long intensive in May. There would be two of these to choose from (similar in content, just held different weeks), with fifteen Fellows in each. Participants agreed to take what they learned from the experience into their classrooms during the following academic year (August to April), engaging their students in one or more difficult dialogues and field-testing one or more new techniques. They would meet again twice as a full group, once for a day in January, and again for a three-day evaluation retreat the following May. Optional informal gatherings were encouraged. They were expected to collaborate, engage, support each other, fail, try again, learn from experience, learn from each other, grow.

Faculty Intensive

A faculty committee designed the basic week-long curriculum, structuring it around a few big themes such as race, class, culture, science, and religion. The idea was to approach each topic by modeling a few simple techniques: ideas we could potentially bring into our own classrooms to reach different



A faculty development opportunity that focuses on critical topics and takes place over several days.

Timing

Hold it at the beginning of the summer break, after spring grades are in but before everybody gets too far from campus.

Curriculum

Link difficult dialogues in race, gender, class, culture, science, religion, politics, and/or social justice with strategies and techniques for engaging in productive discussion. Enlist colleagues and community members to address areas of particular concern for your campus.

Presentation

Vary your presentation styles. Try a number of new techniques. Stay flexible. Check in with folks regularly. Make time to engage in the actual difficult dialogues that arise within the group.

Free lunch

Take breaks. Feed and water the group regularly. Think healthy: fruit, yogurt, light snacks, sandwiches, salads. No doughnuts. Make an effort to limit the amount of trash generated, using cutlery, cups, and plateware made from environmentally sustainable products.

kinds of learners, lead to more productive discussions, and promote deeper kinds of learning. We found many of these techniques in *Discussion as a Way of Teaching* by Stephen Brookfield and Stephen Preskill, which we adopted as our text. But we also relied largely on the strengths of our own faculty and staff to act as colleague-to-colleague teachers, with the idea that faculty would learn best from each other. We decided to both introduce new approaches and experience them ourselves wherever possible; we wanted to have a bit of firsthand knowledge of how the techniques might be received by our students.

We held two intensives that first year. The daily agendas varied slightly but followed roughly the same progression. On the first day, we considered faculty rights and responsibilities with regard to academic freedom, shared the difficulties we've encountered in our own classrooms, and learned how to handle disruptive students. Day Two was devoted to Western traditions of civil discourse, particularly rhetoric and debate. On the third day we addressed issues of race, class, and culture, with an emphasis on the indigenous Alaska Native cultures in our midst. Day Four was reserved for science and religion. And on Friday we tried to tie it all together before setting everyone free to practice on their own.

Faculty Intensive: Sample Agenda

- Day 1: *Academic Freedom*
Tales from the Trenches
Codes of Conduct
How to Handle Disruptive Students
- Day 2: *Questions and Categories*
Rhetoric
Debate
- Day 3: *White Privilege*
Culturally Sensitive Teaching
Circle of Objects
The Five Minute Rule
- Day 4: *Theological Arguments*
Science and Religion
Role Playing
- Day 5: *Difficult Dialogues*
Taking It Out Into the World

Few professors receive training in best practices for teaching, and fewer still in how to tackle controversial issues or handle conflict, prior to being tossed into their own classrooms to teach. If we want our universities to remain vital training grounds for engagement in a democratic society, we must model ways to conduct civil discourse in the classroom. In order to do this, we need to offer more faculty development opportunities like this one.

Lauren Bruce
Director

The intensives offer a rare opportunity for faculty to form a true learning community around a highly significant teaching challenge: how to address tough topics in the classroom. They question, collaborate with, and learn from one another as they encounter viewpoints, issues, personal biases, and disciplinary perspectives different from those they typically meet in their everyday academic lives.

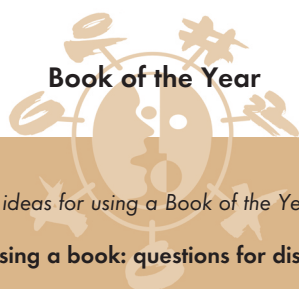
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Book of the Year

The two universities also launched a joint Books of the Year program in the fall of 2006 to give us a shared platform for raising controversial issues that our students and campuses could address together. APU had tried something similar the previous year, using Thoreau's *Walden* and Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* and *Sketches Here and There* to illuminate themes related to ecological sustainability. We built this new effort from their experience.

We invited the faculties of both universities to submit book nominations. We told them we were looking for controversy, that we preferred fiction, and asked them to recommend short works that would be accessible to all students, including our under-prepared, international, and English as a Second Language (ESL) populations. Our selection process resulted in two very different books that explore themes of cultural conflict, immigration, and assimilation. We promoted them as Books of the Semester that first year, with Anne Fadiman's *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* for the fall and T.C. Boyle's *The Tortilla Curtain* in the spring. We invited both authors to visit our campuses, and Boyle accepted, arriving in the spring for a public reading and discussion with several faculty and student groups.



Book of the Year

Some ideas for using a Book of the Year program as a platform for difficult dialogues.

Choosing a book: questions for discussion

- What themes do you want to explore, and can you link them to current events or local initiatives?
- How many disciplines will be likely to participate in discussion?
- Do you prefer fiction or nonfiction?
- How much does length or reading level matter?
- How much do the author's ethnicity, gender, politics, or credentials matter?
- Is it important that the author be potentially available for a campus reading or workshop?

Implementation

It can take up to a year of advance planning to launch a successful Book program.

- **Fall:** Announce the theme and selection parameters for the coming year. Solicit nominations from across the campus. Appoint a review committee.
- **Winter:** Research nominations. Develop short list. Read as many as possible.
- **Spring:** Select and announce book. Develop promotional plan and reading guides. Make arrangements with bookstore.
- **Summer:** Develop promotional materials. Plan events. Purchase and distribute copies to libraries, residence halls, and other gathering places. Give copies to faculty. Announce and promote titles to new students in pre-orientation materials. Consider asking students to read books during the summer and include discussions in fall orientation activities.
- **Fall:** Hold workshops for faculty to exchange teaching ideas.

Practice

Throughout the year, we talked about the books, tried new techniques in our classrooms, held a variety of public events, and paid attention to controversy with a heightened awareness and a shared sense of purpose. Twice we met in a formal setting as a large group to stoke the fires of that purpose and to share our successes, failures, concerns, and ideas with our new colleagues.

In many ways, the effect was revolutionary. Most of us had previously worked more or less in isolation, sharing relationships and concerns only within our own departments and disciplines, rarely if ever collaborating with faculty from other disciplines, much less other universities. Sometimes these new relationships went really well, strengthening us in welcome and unexpected ways. Other times they were a source of irritation and conflict, of cultural clash between both individuals and institutions. But always they provided us with new opportunities to learn more ourselves, and to pass on what we learned to each other and to our students.

The Second Year

Our administrators were impressed enough to fund a third faculty intensive in 2007 and a fourth in 2008, effectively doubling faculty involvement in the *Difficult Dialogues* initiative. Book enthusiasts were committed enough to select a new theme (religion and politics) and two new Books of the Year for 2007-08: *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood and *The Swallows of Kabul* by Yasmina Khadra. Our institutions funded this effort as well. As this handbook goes to print, two books on Alaska Native issues have been selected for our 2008-09 Books of the Year, and a faculty/community committee has compiled a companion volume addressing frequently asked questions about Alaska Native peoples and issues, with additional recommended readings. These efforts have so far proved sustainable. And each year our ambition grows.

We use our Books of the Year program in a unique way, not to create a freshman class bonding experience as many universities do, but to provoke serious discussions at all levels throughout the curriculum. We have found that two shorter books can work well together throughout the academic year, and we no longer promote the books separately by semester. We have also used films, plays, music, and other performing arts and media to support the conversations around the themes in our books.

John Dede
Special Assistant to the Senior Vice Provost
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This Handbook

This handbook is another opportunity to share what we are learning. It is organized roughly along the lines of our faculty intensives. The first five chapters follow the five-day intensive program and our first year of practice, introducing some of the themes we have explored and some of the techniques we have found useful. They are by no means the only worthy themes or useful techniques, but they have worked for us (or else failed us in interesting and instructive ways). The sixth chapter explores some of the outcomes we achieved with our original cohort. The seventh chapter invites you to consider with us where we could go from this humble but promising beginning.

Our experience is in no way comprehensive; we especially recommend the Brookfield text for a more thorough and academic exploration of discussion-based teaching. The techniques we present are in a shorthand format, and you may wish to research them more thoroughly before applying them to your particular situations. We offer them to you in the same spirit we've offered them to each other over the past two years: as suggestions and prompts, food for thought, a few things you might try if you want to improve your teaching, engage your students, stimulate learning, and create more inclusive and democratic classrooms.

We think they're a good place to start.

Our faculty are challenged by time (which they often don't have) and by distance (several of our campuses are hundreds of miles apart). We hope to set aside time and space—if only between the covers of this handbook—to begin to establish a teaching commons where faculty members can talk in earnest with their colleagues about classroom issues critical to the scholarship of teaching.

Renée Carter-Chapman
Senior Vice Provost
University of Alaska Anchorage

Speaking the Language

Throughout this handbook we have used a few terms more or less interchangeably to refer to our local project, the national initiative that sponsored it, and our individual attempts to engage difficult dialogues in our classrooms and communities.

Civil discourse: a nonviolent, democratic approach to problem-solving, in which competing points of view may be expressed, considered, and evaluated in an environment of mutual respect.

Difficult Dialogues: the Ford Foundation's national initiative that supported our project.

Difficult dialogues: the most common shorthand for referring to the controversial and contentious issues we addressed throughout our project.

Encountering Controversy: the name of our project as it appeared on our original grant application.

Engaging Controversy: the name we ultimately adopted to signal our more active stance.

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	APU	UAA
Affiliation	Private	Public
Mission Emphasis	Active learning, leadership, civic engagement	Access, excellence, engagement
Enrollment	719	19,674
Student Diversity		
African American	4.6%	3.5%
Alaska Native/ American Indian	14%	9%
Asian/Pacific Island	2.6%	6.7%
Hispanic	3.7%	4.5%
White	65.3%	70.4%
Faculty	51	Regular/Term: 575 Temporary: 658
Campuses	Anchorage	Anchorage Kenai Peninsula College Kodiak College Matanuska Susitna College Prince William Sound Community College

Sources: APU data came from the APU Registrar: Fall 2007, undergraduate and graduate students combined. UAA data came from UAA Institutional Research: Fall 2007, all campuses, undergraduate and graduate students combined.

Ground Rules

One of our strongest convictions about discussion is that students learn to speak in critical and democratic ways by watching people in positions of power and authority model these processes in their own lives.

Brookfield and Preskill

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FACULTY INTENSIVE

Day One

It's not easy to get started on any new venture; you have to overcome inertia, build new habits and relationships, disrupt comfortable positions, and ignore the easy escape routes. You also have to know that the first time you try something new, at least some small part of your efforts may fail. You have to risk that, plan for it as best you can, and then just start.

We have presented our faculty intensive three times now, and each time we have organized Day One a little differently. We typically start with an introduction by our facilitator Libby Roderick and a few exercises to get people talking. We develop our own discussion rules and codes of conduct for the week. UAA philosophy professor and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences James Liszka presents a brief history of academic freedom and leads a discussion of several recent cases that put our evolving rights and responsibilities to the test. Psychology professor Claudia Lampman discusses her study of contrapower harassment on UAA's Anchorage campus. UAA Dean of Students Bruce Schultz discusses safety issues and outlines a number of effective responses to disruptive students. Interspersed with these more formal presentations, we've told each other stories of past confrontations, and we've role-played alternate endings. We've tried to identify the difficult dialogues within our own group.

Whatever the precise order of exercises and presentations, we've tried always to keep certain goals in mind. We want to start right away building trust and a sense of shared purpose within the group. We introduce a range of approaches to ensure that participants of all learning styles will be as engaged as possible. We try to defuse any fears and tensions in the room by allowing people to tell their stories, critique the day's activities, and share their individual experiences and goals with each other.

These are the ground rules of our project: participation, engagement, collaboration, balancing safety and risk. And this is our shared purpose: understanding and exercising our academic freedom in the interests of strengthening our teaching and raising the bar on civil discourse in our classrooms, campuses, and communities.

None of this is easy, of course, and none of what we do is complete. But you have to start somewhere.

Sample Agenda

- Introduction and Overview
- Exercise: Code of Conduct
- Presentation: Academic Freedom
- Discussion: Case Studies
- Presentation: Contrapower Harassment
- Exercise: Tales from the Trenches
- Presentation: Recognizing and Handling Disruptive Students
- Reflection: Critical Incident Questionnaire

TALES FROM THE TRENCHES

We like to start our intensive by giving our faculty participants a chance to share some of their most difficult classroom experiences. We ask them to pair off and spend a couple of minutes telling each other about a disruptive student, a tough experience, or a topic that they have found especially difficult to talk about in class. One person agrees to go first, and after a few minutes we ask them to switch. After both have had a chance to speak, the group comes back together, and each pair is invited to share at least one of their stories with the full group.

We chose this exercise because we know these experiences are out there. When we ask applicants why they want to be part of this project, many respond with stories of things that have happened to them, episodes that upset them, moments they wish they would have handled differently. Some have experienced threatening incidents as well and, as a result, are reluctant to approach certain topics in their classrooms. “You can’t really hold a difficult dialogue if you’re afraid, or if you’re avoiding the subject because of past experiences,” says Libby Roderick, our facilitator. “So we thought we’d better take care of this first.”

We think it is helpful for people to learn that they are not alone: what has happened to them has happened to others as well. We also want to break down the assumption that we always have to look good in front of our peers. Peer review is so ingrained in academic life that it can interfere with our ability to admit failures and learn together from our mistakes. Finally, we want to acknowledge and release some of the tension in the room. People need to be heard before they can take in new information. Basically, this technique allows us to offload some of our bad histories so we can start creating new history—together.



Tales from the Trenches

This exercise gives everyone a chance to participate without forcing anyone to speak to the group at large.

First telling: dyads (10 minutes)

- Break the full group up into dyads (groups of two).
- Take five minutes for each person to tell the other a story or share a concern.
At the end of five minutes, ask the speakers to switch.

Second telling: full group (30 minutes)

- Bring the group back together and invite each pair to tell one of their stories to the larger group.
- After all pairs have told a story (or passed), open the floor for comments from everyone.

Tip: This technique works best if all participants agree to confidentiality. When they leave the room, they are free to tell their own tales again, but not to reveal each other’s stories without explicit permission.

Adapted from Brookfield and Preskill, Discussion as a Way of Teaching

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

While most university professors are familiar with academic freedom in its broadest sense, many are not well informed about the origin and scope of the concept and may not realize how much gray area it encompasses. This essay introduces academic freedom as a process of evolving rights and responsibilities, with a deep history and an uncertain future, in which what we do each day in our classrooms matters.

Academic Freedom: A Basic Guide

Dr. James Liszka

*Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and Professor of Philosophy
University of Alaska Anchorage*

A Brief History of Academic Freedom

The idea of academic freedom in America actually had its beginnings in nineteenth century German universities, which were considered to be some of the best in the world at that time. The German concept was based on two notions: *Lehrfreiheit*, the freedom to teach; and *Lernfreiheit*, the freedom to learn. The latter referred to the right of students to choose a course of study and electives, while the former formed the heart of what we consider academic freedom today. *Lehrfreiheit* meant that professors were free to pursue the study of their expertise with no interference from the state. There were self-imposed restrictions on extramural activities, particularly in areas outside of a professor's expertise. But otherwise, the concept was widely recognized and well protected by governmental institutions.

The freedom to teach and learn had powerful positive effects on the German universities. The lack of political constraints led to faster and more innovative research development in a number of fields, and the practice of hiring and retaining faculty for their research competence rather than political conformity or favoritism led to a more competent, expert faculty. Both outcomes were key to the success of the German universities. Indeed, the original justification for academic freedom was the claim that it led to better, more innovative research and scholarship.

Most American universities of the time were sectarian, having been founded on a religious basis. They were typically controlled by trustees with an avowed interest in ensuring that the creed and vision of their religious sect was realized in the mission of its university. Often this became an impediment to research, particularly in the sciences. Many American professors had received their degrees from German universities and seen the results of the German freedoms in action. They began to wish for similar conditions in their own institutions.

Change

An impetus to change was Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution. It was introduced to the world with the publication of *The Origin of Species* in 1859, and it gained progressively larger numbers of adherents among scientists in the next few decades. At the same time, it became a source of conflict between the mission and vision of sectarian universities and the yearning for academic freedom of scientists. In those early years, many professors and scientists were dismissed from their positions for teaching or advocating the theory of evolution. Even by 1880, many college presidents denounced the theory.

However, as the result of the well-publicized struggles of these professors (and others, similarly dismissed for advocating theories or ideas contrary to their institution’s ideology), the professoriate began to organize to advocate for and defend the notion of academic freedom. In 1915, two philosophers, Arthur Lovejoy (of Johns Hopkins University) and John Dewey (of Columbia University), formed the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), with the defense of academic freedom at the forefront of its mission. Especially through the efforts of Lovejoy—who traveled around the country gathering cases—the AAUP became a strong advocate and protector of academic freedom.

The original justification for academic freedom was the claim that it led to better, more innovative research and scholarship.

The AAUP made its first and strongly definitive statement on academic freedom in 1915, with a later revision in 1940. Both versions expressed three basic principles pertaining to the intellectual life of the professoriate, outlining both freedoms and limitations:

● Teachers are entitled to full freedom in research and in the publication of the results, subject to the adequate performance of their other academic duties; but research for pecuniary return should be based upon an understanding with the authorities of the institution.

● Teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject, but they should be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter that has no relation to their subject. Limitations of academic freedom because of religious or other aims of the institution should be clearly stated in writing at the time of the appointment.

● College and university teachers are citizens, members of a learned profession, and officers of an educational institution. When they speak or write as citizens they should be free from institutional censorship or discipline, but their special position in the community imposes special obligations. As scholars and educational officers, they should remember that the public may judge their profession and their institution by their utterances. Hence they should at all times be accurate, exercise appropriate restraint, show respect for the opinions of others, and make every effort to indicate that they are not speaking for the institution.

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Freedom to Teach/Freedom to Learn ideas developed in German Universities.

Scientific community embraces evolution; university presidents still decry it.

American Association of University Professors issues Statement on Academic Freedom.

1800

1859

1880

1900-1919

1915

Prussian Constitution declares “science and its teaching shall be free.”

Incongruity between academic and legal notions

Legal History

Although the idea of academic freedom was gaining ground in academic settings by the beginning of the twentieth century, it was not yet an accepted legal notion. In fact, at the time of AAUP's 1915 Statement on Academic Freedom, the Supreme Court had a rather weak interpretation of the First Amendment itself, upon which the legal notion of academic freedom would eventually be based. The courts were slow to take up the idea, and many academicians are surprised to discover that the first mention of academic freedom in the legal system was not made until the 1950s.

Legal scholars recognize four phases of the development of academic freedom as a legal concept. The first, roughly up to 1919, was dominated by the incongruity between the academic and legal notions. The Supreme Court at that time regarded professors solely as employees of the institution, and, because of the agency relation involved, considered it permissible for the employer to restrict the speech of the employee. This was so even up until 1929 in the famous Scopes trial, concerning a high school biology teacher who taught evolution in the classroom.

In the second phase, from 1919 to 1950, the higher courts developed a broader interpretation of the First Amendment that paved the way for the recognition of academic freedom. In the third phase, from 1950-1970, we see the first legal establishment of the notion of academic freedom, prompted in part by issues raised during the McCarthy era. In the most famous case of this period (*Sweezy v. New Hampshire*, 1968), Justice Felix Frankfurter established a precedent by articulating four essential freedoms a university must be allowed to determine for itself on academic grounds: who may teach, what may be taught, how it shall be taught, and who may be admitted to study.

The fourth phase, from 1970 to today, involves a clarification of the institutional, instructional, and student interests in academic freedom. Most of the recent court cases focus on whether academic freedom resides primarily with the institution or with the faculty member, and attempts to define the limits of speech in the classroom, particularly in terms of hostile, racially charged, and sexually explicit language.

"A university ceases to be true to its own nature if it becomes the tool of Church or State or any sectional interest. A university is characterized by the spirit of free inquiry, its ideal being the ideal of Socrates – to follow the argument where it leads. It is the business of a university to provide that atmosphere which is most conducive to speculation, experiment, and creation. It is an atmosphere in which there prevail the four essential freedoms of a university to determine for itself on academic grounds: who may teach; what may be taught; how it shall be taught; and who may be admitted to study."

Justice Felix Frankfurter
Sweezy v. New Hampshire (1968)

1929	1919-1950	1950-1970	1968	2007
Scopes Monkey Trial	Courts develop broader interpretation of First Amendment.	Courts clarify institutional, instructional, and student interests in academic freedom.	<i>Sweezy v. New Hampshire</i>	<i>Morse v. Frederick</i>

Academic Freedom Today: General Guidelines

There is still ambiguity concerning several issues in academic freedom, and the courts continue to interpret and clarify the precedents of the past. Because of the ongoing nature of all this, many faculty and administrators are unclear about the rights and limits of academic speech in the university setting.

1. What is protected under academic freedom?

As guidelines, the following are considered to be protected under academic freedom, given current legal interpretations:

- **The freedom to pursue inquiry and publish its results.** This is one of the original and most important reasons for academic freedom. The independence of the scholar and the ability of the university to protect the scholar from the pressures of public opinion or legislative power are key duties of the university.
- **The freedom to discuss or read materials in the classroom,** although the AAUP cautions against the introduction of controversial material that has no relevance to the subject matter.
- **The freedom to refuse to sign loyalty oaths** as a condition of employment.
- **Student speech,** subject to the same constraints as faculty classroom speech given below.



UAA faculty and students addressed questions of academic freedom in an extended conversation about politics in the classroom. See pages 170-194.

2. What is not protected under academic freedom?

Based on a body of legal cases, the following have not been protected in the courts under the purview of academic freedom claims:

- **Sexual harassment.**
- **Speech, forums, performances, or art on campus** that can be shown to be illegal, obscene, libelous, slanderous, or are a clear and present danger, or can be shown to be disruptive to the operations of the classroom or university. The exhibition of controversial or offensive art may be restricted by administration as to time, place, and manner of exhibition.
- **Racial slurs, excessively obscene, vulgar, or profane language in the classroom,** explicit sexual materials, and other forms of language that create a hostile learning environment for students, unless they are used as examples, or for the purposes of study, or are relevant to the subject of the class.
- **Speech or dissemination of materials with the university imprimatur by employees** of the university community who are not authorized to speak or disseminate information on behalf of the university. Only designated officers of the university may speak on behalf of the university or distribute or disseminate materials that carry the imprimatur of the university.

3. Where is academic freedom protected?

- **The classroom and the university** are the primary places of academic freedom; print and publications are included as well.
- **Extramural settings and matters of public concern**, as long as faculty members indicate that they are not speaking for the institution. The AAUP emphasizes that such speech should be accurate, restrained, and respectful.

4. Who is protected?

This is less clear than answers to the other questions. Although most faculty are under the impression that it is faculty members alone who are the central focus in academic freedom issues, recent court cases have suggested that where there are conflicts between faculty and institutions on this issue, the locus of academic freedom is not always with the faculty member; in many cases it lies with the institution. Some recent cases (in particular *Lovelace v. Southeastern Massachusetts University*) have suggested that matters such as grading policy and even course content can be subject to policy decision by university administrators. Students have also been the focus as well. *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* (1969) showed that teachers or administrators cannot discipline students through suspension, grades, or otherwise for non-disruptive classroom expression of political views.

Case Studies for Discussion

A good way to introduce the complexity and nuance of academic freedom is to examine a few controversial cases. Included here are three actual cases, followed by the results of either legal review or expert opinion. Read the first half of the story and then stop. How do you think the story should end?

CASE STUDY

Obscene Language in the Classroom

John Bonnell is an English instructor at a community college where he has taught since 1967. In his lectures, he liberally uses the words “shit,” “fuck,” “cunt,” “ass” and “pussy.” Commenting on stories that contain romantic scenes, he talks about his own personal sexual experiences. Commenting on news events, he uses the phrases “butt-fucking” and “blow-job,” and makes other coarse references such as “tits on a nun are as useful as balls on a priest.” Several women in the classroom are offended and complain to the dean in writing, saying that Bonnell’s use of such language is demeaning and creates a hostile learning environment.

Stop. Before reading any further, what do you think?

Should the dean defend John Bonnell’s speech as protected under the framework of academic freedom?

What Actually Happened

The dean reprimanded Bonnell, telling him he was prohibited from using vulgar language in the classroom. Bonnell sued. The case, *Bonnell v. Lorenzo* (2001), eventually reached the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, which held that, while Bonnell had the right to use obscene words, he did not have a constitutional right to use them in a classroom setting where they are not germane to the subject matter and are in contravention to the college's sexual harassment policy.

“Although we do not wish to chill speech in the classroom setting, especially in the unique milieu of a college or university where debate and the clash of viewpoints are encouraged — if not necessary — to spur intellectual growth, it has long been held that despite the sanctity of the First Amendment, speech that is vulgar or profane is not entitled to absolute constitutional protection.”

In a different case, *Hardy v. Jefferson Community College* (2001), the same court ruled in favor of an instructor who used similarly vulgar speech but with a different intent. The course was entitled “Introduction to Interpersonal Communication” and the instructor, Hardy, employed several racist and sexist epithets. Despite student complaints, the court decided that Hardy's language usage was in the context of a “discussion and analysis of words that have historically served the interests of the dominant culture in which they arise.”

Conclusion: Both Bonnell and Hardy used objectionable language in their respective classrooms; the distinction, however, lies in the degree to which the language was germane to the subject matter.

CASE STUDY

Overt Political Viewpoints

This course was offered at the University of California, Berkeley under English R1A, designed to provide undergraduates with enhanced skills in reading and writing. The original course description, published in the course schedule, was as follows:

***The Politics and Poetics of Palestinian Resistance.** Since the inception of the Intifada in September of 2000, Palestinians have been fighting for their right to exist. The brutal Israeli military occupation of Palestine, an occupation that has been ongoing since 1948, has systematically displaced, killed, and maimed millions of Palestinian people. And yet, from under the brutal weight of the occupation, Palestinians have produced their own culture and poetry of resistance. This class will examine the history of the Palestinian resistance and the way that it is narrated by Palestinians in order to produce an understanding of the Intifada and to develop a coherent political analysis of the situation. This class takes as its starting point the right of Palestinians to fight for their own self-determination. Conservative thinkers are encouraged to seek other sections.*

Complaints from students and faculty prompted administrators to address the issue. The chair of the English department, acting on the recommendations of a faculty committee, urged the instructor to rewrite the course description so that it used less combative language and did not exclude students with a certain political bent.

Stop. Before reading any further, what do you think?

Should this course be protected under academic freedom? Or should the professor rewrite the course description and rethink how the course will be taught?

What Actually Happened

The instructor did as requested and rewrote the description:

This is a course on Palestinian resistance poetry. It takes as its point of departure the Palestinian literature that has developed since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, which has displaced, maimed, and killed many Palestinian people. The Israeli military occupation of historic Palestine has caused unspeakable suffering. Since the occupation, Palestinians have been fighting for their right to exist. And yet, from under the weight of this occupation, Palestinians have produced their own culture and poetry of resistance. This class will examine the history of the Palestinian resistance and the way that it is narrated by Palestinians. The instructor takes as his starting point the right of Palestinians to fight for their own self-determination. Discussions about the literature will focus on several intersecting themes: how are Palestinian artists able to imagine art under the occupation; what consequences does resistance have on the character of the art that is produced (i.e. why are there so few Palestinian epics and plays and comedies); can one represent the Israeli occupation in art; what is the difference between political art and propaganda and how do the debates about those terms inflect the production of literature; how do poems represent the desire to escape and the longing for home simultaneously (alternatively, how do poems represent the nation without a state); what consequence do political debates have on formal innovations and their reproduction; and what are the obligations of artists in representing the occupation. This 1A course offers students frequent practice in a variety of forms of discourse leading toward exposition and argumentation in common standard English. The course aims at continuing to develop the students' practical fluency with sentence, paragraph, and thesis-development skills but with increasingly complex applications. Students will be assigned a number of short essays (2-4 written pages) and several revisions.

According to Robert Post, a nationally recognized law professor with expertise on academic freedom, these revisions were the right ones to make. Academic freedom does permit instructors to present subject matter with a certain political orientation but does not allow them to exclude certain classes of students from the classroom because of it:

The determining criteria should be whether the course description meets professional standards, i.e., it must be educationally justified. The faculty member can indicate the

particular perspective or political framework from which a particular subject matter is being taught, but it should not be so forcefully stated as to be threatening, nor designed to exclude certain kinds of students.

Conclusion: This case demonstrates that academic freedom extends to students as well as instructors and to course descriptions as well as in-class activities.

CASE STUDY

Offensive Art

Albert Piarowski was chair of the art department at Prairie State College in Illinois. As part of the annual art department faculty exhibition, he placed three of his own works on display. The works were exhibited in the principal building of the college, in an open area on the main floor known as “the mall” that adjoins a student lounge and is the college’s main gathering space. Classrooms are on the upper floors.

Piarowski’s work consisted of eight stained-glass windows, five of which were abstract and three of which were representational. One of the latter depicted the naked rump of a brown woman, with a white cylinder resembling a finger sticking out from or into it that was meant to represent a jet of gas. In other words, it was a representation of flatulence. Another showed a brown woman from the back, standing naked except for stockings, and apparently masturbating. The third again depicted a brown woman, also naked except for stockings and also seen from the rear, crouching in a posture of veneration before a robed white male, whose most prominent feature is an oversized erect penis that the woman is embracing.

Based on many complaints from students, faculty, employees, and visitors, the chancellor ordered Piarowski to move the offending stained-glass pieces from the mall to another, less public location.

Stop. Before reading any further, what do you think?

Should Piarowski’s art be protected under academic freedom?

What Actually Happened

Piarowski brought the case to court. In *Piarowski v. Illinois Community College*, Judge Richard Posner (U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit) walked the line between the instructor’s right to exhibit and the institution’s interest in running its affairs, protecting its reputation, and settling a potentially disruptive display of art. Posner wrote:

When we consider that the expression in this case was not political, that it was regulated rather than suppressed, that the plaintiff is not only a faculty member but an

administrator, that good alternative sites may have been available to him, and that in short he is claiming a First Amendment right to exhibit sexually explicit and racially offensive art work in what amounts to the busiest corridor in a college that employs him in a responsible administrative as well as academic position, we are driven to conclude that the defendants did not infringe the plaintiff's First Amendment rights merely by ordering him to move the art to another room in the same building.

Posner infers that had the art been clearly political, then stronger protections may have been warranted. As long as alternative locations for exhibition were made available, then Posner allowed that the university could reasonably direct Piarowski to display the work elsewhere.

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has a similar statement on "Academic Freedom and Artistic Expression," that suggests universities may control "time, place, and manner" of exhibition of controversial art:

Artistic expression in the classroom, studio, and workshop therefore merits the same assurance of academic freedom that is accorded to other scholarly and teaching activities. Since faculty and student artistic presentations to the public are integral to their teaching, learning, and scholarship, these presentations no less merit protection. Educational and artistic criteria should be used by all who participate in the selection and presentation of artistic works. Reasonable content-neutral regulation of the "time, place, and manner" of presentations should be developed and maintained. Academic institutions are obliged to ensure that regulations and procedures do not impair freedom of expression or discourage creativity by subjecting work to tests of propriety or ideology.

Conclusion: When academic institutions offer exhibitions or performances to the public, they should ensure that the rights of the presenters and the audience are not impaired by a "heckler's veto" from those who may be offended by the presentation. Academic institutions should ensure that those who choose to view or attend may do so without interference. Mere presentation in a public place does not create a "captive audience." Institutions may reasonably designate specific places as generally available or unavailable for exhibitions or performances.

ESTABLISHING DISCUSSION RULES

Establishing discussion rules right from the start provides a solid foundation for every other practice and technique described in this handbook. Discussion rules are also known as classroom norms, codes of conduct, and guidelines or agreements for civil discourse; these terms are used more or less interchangeably throughout our conversations. Whatever we choose to call them, many professors develop them on their own, placing them in their syllabus or on a handout they give to students early in the term. But our experience suggests that it is more effective to engage students in creating their own classroom rules.

At the beginning of each intensive, we had our faculty participants develop the code they wished to follow for engaging in civil discourse throughout the week. Similarly, in the classroom, a Code of Conduct exercise reminds students of what they expect from themselves and each other. It can serve as an ice-breaker, a trust builder, and a reminder in case a behavior later becomes a problem.

Of all the techniques we introduced in our faculty intensive, this one was the most frequently applied. Most of our participants tried it out at least once; many of them made it a routine part of beginning their classes.



Code of Conduct

A basic technique that asks students to establish their own expectations for classroom behavior.

Develop Rules

- Divide the larger group into smaller sub-groups of three to five individuals.
- Ask them to make a short list of desirable and undesirable classroom behaviors. Give the groups about five minutes to make their lists.
- Bring everyone back together, and then invite the groups to share their lists.

Achieve Consensus

Combine similar items to create a list in each category that the class can agree on. Save these and display or refer to them regularly throughout the semester.

Determine Sanctions

Using a similar process, have the class develop sanctions for violations of the rules. Be prepared to negotiate on this; they may recommend harsher penalties than you want to enforce!

The following essay describes how one professor was able to link the Code of Conduct exercise directly to her course content, using it not only to establish discussion rules for the class but also to demonstrate the effects individuals and groups have on each other and to illustrate key sociological concepts such as norms, deviancy, and sanctions.

Creating Classroom Norms

Dr. Sharon Araji

Professor of Sociology

University of Alaska Anchorage

The Codes of Conduct exercise fits especially well with the subject matter of sociology. The classroom can, to some extent, be transformed into a miniature society with its own culture, norms, deviants, and sanctions. Students can be encouraged to see their personal norms within the context of group norms and to witness the effect of individuals on groups and of groups on individuals.

I introduced this exercise for the first time in an upper-division social psychology class. In preparation, students were instructed to prepare a list of personal norms for the classroom and to bring it with them to the next class period. In class, they were divided into four groups by counting off “one, two, three, four” in order to mix up students who were likely to sit with their friends. The groups were instructed first to discuss their personal norms and why they came up with particular items (demonstrating how past experiences influence present attitudes). Next they were instructed to come up with a list of group norms (demonstrating the relationships between individuals and the group). Finally, the groups came back together as a class to reach consensus on a set of classroom norms (demonstrating the effects of groups on other groups).

Of course, norms are only ideas written on paper, and sanctions (both positive and negative) are usually necessary to achieve conformity to those norms. After introducing this concept, I repeated the exercise by having students develop their own list of personal sanctions and then a set of consensus sanctions in class. The students came up with sanctions that were surprisingly punitive and very hard to enforce. For example, the class suggested that students who talk among themselves during a lecture should be asked to leave the room; students who come to class unprepared should get lower grades; and repeat offenders should be kicked out of the course.

Who would enforce these rules? They basically thought I should. How much time would this enforcement take? Would any student’s rights be violated? After some discussion and negotiation, they agreed that enforcement could be less punitive. For several weeks, I brought a large poster to class and displayed the rules so all could see. Near the end of the semester, I brought it back for our discussion of deviancy. The students found it interesting to see where and how they had violated their own rules, and how these activities related to the chapter on deviancy.

The whole experience was so successful that I decided to use it again in a lower-division introductory course the following semester. This class, on the whole, was much younger than the upper-division class; many students were recent graduates from high school. I planned to introduce the exercise on the day we were scheduled to begin the chapter on deviance and social control. This was also the day I gave students back their first exam.

I typically have students sign an attendance sheet in class, and base 2.5% of the course grade on attendance. After we had gone over the exam, about six students, who always sat at the back of

the room, left. At that point I distributed a second attendance sheet. I then introduced the chapter by talking about society's need for social order and norms. I pointed out how once norms or laws are implemented some people will still deviate from those norms or break those laws. In an attempt to maintain social order, society creates sanctions and stigmas (labels), socially constructed by those in power.

I designated the class members who had not left as the "societal leaders" and charged them with creating a set of classroom norms (societal norms). I repeated the process used the previous semester, first having them create personal norms, then small group norms, and then the larger group norms.

Sharon's Sociology 101 class came up with the following classroom norms:

Sociology 101, Spring 2007

Should

- Have cell phones on silent or turned off
- Be prepared/Do assignments/Participate
- Respect other students and professor

Should Not

- Engage in sidebar talking or visiting with neighbors
- Sign attendance sheet and leave before class ends
- Fall asleep
- Do homework for other classes while in this one
- Eat loud or smelly food

Interestingly, one of their norms was that students should not sign the attendance sheet and then leave (this was aimed at the group who left after we went over the exam). Class time expired before we could create a set of sanctions.

To demonstrate how those who follow the norms may be rewarded and those who deviate may be stigmatized, I made some big yellow stars and brown circles out of construction paper and brought them with me to the next class period. I began that class by saying we were going to engage in an experiment, and briefly reviewed the ethics of conducting research. I told the class that this was voluntary, so anyone who did not want to take part could leave for the next half hour. If they wanted to participate, they would need to sign a consent form. No one left—they all were curious.

After gathering up the consent forms, I displayed a list of all the students who had attended the previous class and stayed the entire time, and presented each of them with a large gold star. Next, I displayed the list of those who had come to class, signed the first attendance sheet, and left. Each student on this list was presented with a large brown circle—a negative stigma/label. Students who had missed the previous class altogether were given neither label. We then explained what had happened after they left the previous class period. As we did

not have time during the prior class period to create sanctions, we repeated the same norm construction process as described above.

Overall, the students liked this experience and said it helped them understand the deviance chapter much better. Conformists and deviants both took a certain pride in their position. "I liked the position of societal leader and the positive label (star)," wrote one. "It made me feel powerful." Another student wrote: "I took pride in my brown circle. I don't see myself as a conformist—I'm like some of the bikers in the chapter who wear labels that are associated with the idea of being deviants or even law breakers."

I liked it too. The exercise engages students while demonstrating many of my discipline's core concerns as a social science that investigates the interactions between the individual and others in society. I will probably continue to use the exercise in the future.

Establishing a code of conduct also works in an online course. I used the wiki plug-in provided in our Blackboard system to create a collaborative space for students in my first-year journalism class. During the first week of class, students were invited to edit the wiki and come up with rules for classroom behavior. Our Online Code of Conduct included the following rules:

- Do not attack what others have said just because you don't agree with it.
- Don't claim the work of others as your own.
- Be open-minded and consider the feelings of others.

Joy Mapaye
Journalism and Public Communications

I used the Code of Conduct activity with a group of educators and administrators in a professional development course last summer. On the first morning of the four-day intensive, I arranged the chairs in a large circle in front of the whiteboard and spent about fifteen minutes leading the class of twenty in co-creating a code of conduct. Most participants engaged with the exercise, either by offering their own suggested agreements or by nodding or shaking their heads as I recorded the agreements on the board. After generating a list, I asked for a show of hands to see which agreements the group was in favor of, and circled those that were supported by the entire group. Both during and after this activity, participants expressed their appreciation for having the opportunity to collaborate in creating a code of conduct for the ensuing days.

Alice Hisamoto
Education

I ask my students to work first in dyads (groups of two) to create a short list of no more than five of what they feel are key standards of behavior during dialogue. Then, in a whole group session, everyone contributes to establish this class's unique set of guidelines.

My ethics class came up with these:

- We show respect.
- We maintain a sense of humor.
- We're prepared.
- We're open to new ideas.
- We allow time to think – respecting the silence.

The class also felt the need to further define what they meant by respect:

- It's a safe place intellectually.
- We listen to each other.
- We don't interrupt or yell, and we apologize or explain ourselves if we are disrespectful.

Through the process of creating them, students became aware of the standards and began to internalize the expectations. The exercise was so effective we rarely had to refer to the guidelines again. A gentle reminder was all that was necessary when a discussion began to heat up.

Christine Gehrett
Education

The time you spend establishing ground rules can have benefits beyond the rules themselves. The Codes of Conduct exercise can also reveal shared values, illuminate the role that culture plays in determining what we view as “appropriate conduct,” and help students limit their own behavior.

Codes of Conduct

Dr. Kerri Morris

*Associate Professor of English
University of Alaska Anchorage*

Of all of the techniques or strategies discussed during this project, I think that the Codes of Conduct is the most important for me and for my teaching. It is crucial to establish the ground rules for a classroom and also for students to participate in their construction. To spend class time discussing what we as a group value as appropriate behaviors demonstrates that behavior matters and offers every class member the chance to join the group.

I was struck by the deep role culture plays in determining how we understand or define “appropriate conduct.”

Talking about conduct also provides us distance from the behaviors themselves and helps us limit or regulate our own behaviors. One student suggested that one person shouldn’t dominate the conversation. Then she laughed, saying that she would be the most likely transgressor of that rule. It seemed that she offered both self-awareness and permission for classmates to remind her when she spoke too much.

Several interesting things happened when I used this technique in my classroom. First, many of the students had already been in classrooms or groups where codes of conduct were being written. By the time

they got to my class, they were old hands at the process. Much to my surprise they spent ten minutes, no more, “discussing” the rules of most importance to them. In the group discussion, we arrived at our five or six rules in minutes. Practice and experience had helped them to clarify exactly what a classroom needed for appropriate regulation.

Second, I was surprised that one student offered a rule designed to govern my behavior as instructor. She wanted a rule that said, “Students may not negotiate rules of the syllabus with the instructor.” She was intent that all deadlines and assignments listed in the syllabus be enforced exactly as they were written with no exceptions and, further, that we not ever discuss the revision of these rules during class time. It was the only rule I vetoed. As an instructor, I draw clear boundaries between decisions that I make and decisions that students make. Negotiation of deadlines and assignments are sometimes necessary. I felt that the student was outside the bounds of her appropriate sphere of influence by attempting to define my own professional practice.

Third, I was struck by the deep role culture plays in determining how we understand or define “appropriate conduct.” One rule was that students should listen attentively and respectfully. (This was a seminar in which students sat around a table.) I asked students to give concrete examples of “listening respectfully,” to which a young woman replied, “It means leaning forward and nodding while someone else is talking. It is disrespectful to lean back, like this, with one leg crossed over the other.” The class laughed, because, at that moment, a young man was “listening respectfully” in just that physical position. From there, we were able to explore the cultural conditions that influence our concepts of respect. Does a respectful person make eye contact? Does a respectful person write when another person talks?

Finally, the Code of Conduct proved to be very helpful during a heated exchange in which one student made a comment about “white male power,”— which, not incidentally, was a phrase used by the author of an essay that we had read — and another (not surprisingly, a white male) exploded in frustration. Later, we were able to discuss this incident, examining it within a frame of both parties having a legitimate perspective. It was clear the student who used the generalization didn’t intend harm, and it was also clear that the phrase caused harm anyway. Both parties decided that they had played a role, one for succumbing to a negative generalization and the other for failing to be charitable.

AT STAKE: FACULTY PERFORMANCE

Disrespectful and disruptive students can have a poisonous effect on the classroom environment, for faculty as well as for other students. This essay explores the little-known phenomenon of contra power harassment, when students disrespect, harass, bully, or threaten their instructors. Dr. Lampman recounts her own experience with student bullying, and some research she conducted at her home campus. Her survey and interviews of UAA faculty reveal the frequency of contrapower harassment at a large, public institution, and the high cost of failing to deal effectively with it, particularly among female faculty.

Contrapower Harassment on Campus: Incidence, Consequences, Implications

Dr. Claudia Lampman

Professor of Psychology

University of Alaska Anchorage

“You can speak to my lawyer.”

Those are the only words this particular student ever spoke directly to me all semester long. He was a very large man in his fifties and an intimidating presence in my classroom. He always sat directly in front of me and glared, making his hostility clearly and visibly known. Aside from those six words, he communicated with me solely by angry note.

In this course on the psychology of women, students are required to complete weekly assignments that typically involve a kind of data collection, such as interviewing women about the experience of getting their first periods, or observing parents and children interacting at a playground or fast-food restaurant. Most assignments come right out of our best-selling textbook. Students are given a choice in case they find doing one of them uncomfortable.

This student refused to do the assignments, writing in an early note that he could not be ‘forced’ to do research. I responded in class, pointing out that psychology is a social science (emphasis on science) and that upper-division psychology classes, as this was, typically involved data collection and analysis. I reminded the class that alternate assignments were always available; students could analyze advertising, television programs, or make observations at toy stores, if they were uncomfortable with face-to-face data collection.

My response to the class just seemed to make him angrier. In subsequent notes, he labeled the assignments dangerous. Watching children would put him in danger of appearing to be a pedophile, he wrote. The assignments were causing him tremendous stress and anxiety; he was going to file a grievance or a lawsuit. I tried on several occasions to talk to him about his concerns, but he wouldn’t talk to me directly, only in writing. Although he rarely participated in class activities or exams, he was always there before the class began, and he stayed after it ended.

If his intention was to frighten me, it worked. I was scared to be around him, and I started to fear that he could make significant trouble for me at work. I became afraid to go to my classroom alone, grew significantly anxious and stressed, and had trouble concentrating and sleeping. Once, I inadvertently let my class out an hour early because I was so stressed-out by his behavior. I did not, however, report this to anyone until it became clear that I would have to give him a failing grade. I feared that reporting him might make him more angry, hostile, and potentially violent; I also think that as a female faculty member I was afraid of appearing weak. I just wanted the semester to end, and the student to go away. But even after it did, my fears lingered for quite some time.

Several months passed before I began talking to my colleagues about this student's threatening and harassing behaviors. What I found was that my experience was not unique, especially among female faculty, and that many of my peers believed student incivility and bullying were on the rise. Colleagues felt that students seemed increasingly disrespectful, as evidenced by their answering cell phones or reading the newspaper in class or asking them out on dates. Others mentioned that students openly questioned their authority or credentials, yelled or screamed at them, made hostile comments or threats, stalked or harassed them, and even became violent. I discovered that I wasn't the only one who had been derailed emotionally by such an experience. My colleagues told me about stress-related illnesses and loss of productivity, and some also mentioned that they changed assignments, avoided controversial topics, and gave grades students didn't deserve just to make them "go away."

The social scientist in me headed to the library to see what research had been conducted on disrespectful, hostile, or harassing student behaviors. I soon learned a new term: contra-power harassment, which occurs when a person with lesser power within an institution harasses someone with greater power.¹ Over the past twenty years, several studies have surveyed faculty members about their experiences with contrapower sexual harassment.² These studies clearly find that women faculty members are more distressed and negatively impacted by these experiences than men. With most of the research focusing on sexual harassment, I thought it would be important to study the broader definition of contrapower harassment and focus on behaviors ranging from student incivility and bullying to outright violence. So I put together a research team (myself, an adjunct faculty member, and two undergraduate students) and began a series of studies.

In 2005, I conducted the first of these studies, a survey of faculty on the UAA campus.³ The survey asked faculty about their experience with a broad range of student behaviors, including incivility, bullying, and sexual attention from students. Incivility was defined as rude or discourteous behavior demonstrating a lack of regard for others.⁴ Bullying was defined as "physical and verbal aggressive behavior that has the potential to cause physical and/or psychological harm to the victim."⁵ On college campuses, incivility might take the form of disrespectful or rude behaviors (like reading a

My colleagues told me about stress-related illnesses and loss of productivity due to difficult student interactions. Some also mentioned that they changed assignments, avoided controversial topics, and gave grades students didn't deserve just to make them "go away."

1 Benson, 1984.

2 Caroll & Ellis, 1989; DeSousa & Fansler, 2003; Grauerholz, 1989; Matchen & DeSousa, 2000; McKinney, 1990.

3 Lampman, Phelps, Beneke & Bancroft, in press

4 See Nydegger, Paludi, DeSousa & Paludi, 2006

5 DeSousa & Ribeiro, 2005:p.1019

newspaper or answering a phone during a class), bullying might involve hostile or aggressive behaviors (like questioning faculty credentials, making threatening comments, and stalking). Sexual attention would include such actions as asking faculty out on dates or commenting on their appearance.

A total of 399 faculty responded to the survey (61% of the Anchorage campus faculty). Uncivil behaviors were reported as extremely common by both males and females. More than 70% stated that a student had engaged in a non-class activity, slept during one of their classes, or asked them to make their exams or assignments easier. More than 60% said a student had answered a cell phone, continually interrupted them, or showed disdain while they were teaching. More than half reported that a student had challenged their authority or verbally disrespected them. Between 25% and 50% stated that a student had asked them to change a grade without cause, referred to them in an inappropriate way, addressed them by their first name, or violated their personal space. Ten to 25%

So far, my research on contrapower harassment suggests that the vast majority of faculty members on the UAA campus have experienced one or more forms of student incivility or bullying, that very few report it, and that female faculty members are more likely to suffer negative consequences as a result of it.

indicated that a student had questioned their credentials or qualifications, called them at home without permission, touched them in an uncomfortable way, given them an inappropriate gift, or commented on their physical appearance in course evaluations. Sexual attention was reported by 15-30% of faculty respondents, including comments of a sexual nature, unwanted sexual attention, and flirting or requests for dates.

Although bullying behaviors were less common on average, almost half of the respondents indicated that students had written hostile comments on course evaluations. About 30% said a student had yelled or screamed at them, one in four said a student had threatened to file a grievance, and more than one in five had received hostile or threatening emails, letters, or phone messages from a student.

Finally, between 5% and 10% of faculty said

a student had threatened to harm or file a law suit against them, or had followed or stalked them. Fewer than 2% said a student had actually harmed them or filed a lawsuit against them.

A substantial number of faculty also reported significant negative consequences as a result of contrapower harassment. More than one in five indicated they were significantly anxious or stressed, or had difficulty sleeping during a time period when they were experiencing student problems. Between 10% and 20% said they felt depressed, had difficulty concentrating, suffered a loss of productivity, felt physically afraid, did not want to go to work, or changed assignments or teaching style as a direct result of student harassment. In addition, 5-10% said they suffered from stress-related illness, felt embarrassed to talk to their colleagues, thought about giving a grade a student didn't deserve, or dropped a controversial or difficult topic because of problems with a student. About 5% of respondents indicated that they had to let a class out early or went to see a mental health professional for help related to an incident of contrapower harassment. Approximately 2% canceled a class or had a substitute because they wanted to avoid contact with a particular student.

Female professors were significantly more upset by incivility, bullying, and sexual student behaviors than male professors, even when they experienced it less frequently. Female faculty, those who teach women's studies courses, and those who reported more incivility, bullying, and sexual

attention from students experienced significantly greater negative impact on their health, teaching, and work life. Fewer than one in three said they had reported the incident to their department chair or dean, and fewer than one in ten said they had spoken with the dean of students. Male professors were significantly less likely to take some sort of official action than female faculty. Twice as many women (10.2%) as men (5.0%) said they had spoken to the dean of students about a harassment incident. Similarly, 30.5% of women versus 17.5% of men said they had reported student harassment to university administrators. Finally, women were twice as likely to seek the social support of colleagues than men.

One year later, I conducted a follow-up study to explore whether certain types of students, faculty, courses, or situations are more likely to be involved in incidents of contrapower harassment. Of the 399 faculty members who responded to the original survey, fifty-six (14%) reported having experienced at least one “significant incident of contrapower harassment,” and all but one of those agreed to a follow-up interview. During the interview, they were asked to describe 1) the incident; 2) demographic characteristics of the student (sex, race, and age); 3) characteristics of the course (title, level, discipline); 4) whether or not they reported the incident to their department chair, college dean, and/or dean of students; 5) a description of the troubling student behavior; and 6) consequences for their health, teaching, and work life.

Analysis of interviews revealed incidents of stalking, violence, death threats, and other threats of physical harm, unwanted sexual attention, threats of legal action, character assassination, and intimidation and bullying. Although contrapower harassment was not more likely to be reported by women than men, the nature of the incidents and consequences for female faculty appear to be more severe. Contrapower harassment was stressful for all faculty interviewed; however, women were significantly more likely to report depression, anxiety, sleep disturbance, and stress-related illness than men.

The interviews also revealed some clear patterns in terms of the types of courses, faculty, and students most closely associated with harassment. Faculty from the College of Arts and Sciences were disproportionately represented among those interviewed. Faculty were significantly more likely to experience harassment from students of the opposite sex. Although both students and the faculty they harassed tended to be white, the student perpetrators were typically described as nontraditional in age (in their 30s to 50s). Psychopathology (including personality disorders, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia) was often suggested as a contributing factor. Finally, these interviews suggested that successful outcomes were more likely if the incidents were reported to the dean of students rather than academic administrators in one’s college.

Summary

So, far my research on contrapower harassment suggests that the vast majority of faculty members on the UAA campus have experienced one or more forms of student incivility or bullying, that very few report it, and that female faculty members are more likely to suffer negative consequences as a result of it. These results suggest a strong need for faculty development regarding the appropriate ways to handle these situations. Faculty need to understand their rights as instructors as well as when to seek help, whom to talk to, and what campus resources are available to help them cope with such experiences.

SAFETY

Some disruptions are worse than others, of course, but how do you tell the difference? Can you tell a naïve disruption from a threatening one? Do you know what the policies are at your university and where you can go for assistance and support? This essay offers a strategy that leads to better threat assessment and a practical approach to handling disruptions at every level to prevent them from going further.

Recognizing and Responding to Disruptive Students

Dr. Bruce Schultz

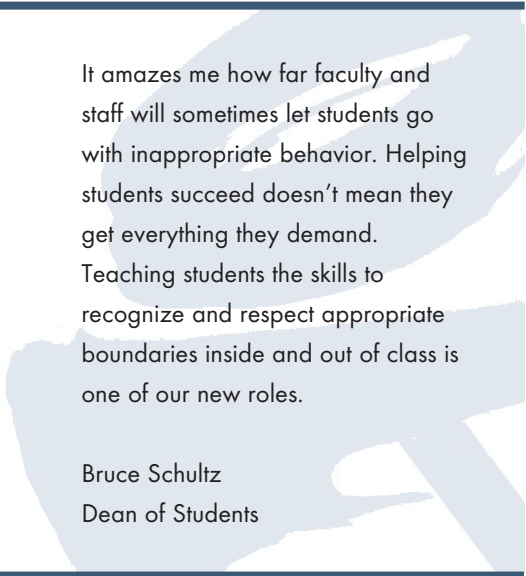
*Dean of Students and Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Development
University of Alaska Anchorage*

In the spring of 2007, one of our worst nightmares came true. A disturbed student went on a shooting rampage at Virginia Tech University, killing 32 of his fellow students and teachers, and then, finally,

himself. Amid the shock, anger, and fear that rippled across the academic world, many asked themselves the same questions. How dangerous have our campuses become? Shouldn't someone have seen this coming? Is there anything we can do to make sure this never happens again?

The bad news is there are no easy answers. Identifying potentially violent students is extremely difficult, even for teams of professionals; for the faculty member acting alone, it is next to impossible. The problem, says a 2003 National Research Council report, "is that...the offenders are not that unusual; they look like their classmates at school." There is no accurate or useful profile of the "typical" school shooter; they come from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds and family situations and have a wide range of friendship patterns and academic histories. Few of them show a marked change in behavior prior to their attack.

The most promising approach for identifying potentially violent students is known as threat



It amazes me how far faculty and staff will sometimes let students go with inappropriate behavior. Helping students succeed doesn't mean they get everything they demand. Teaching students the skills to recognize and respect appropriate boundaries inside and out of class is one of our new roles.

Bruce Schultz
Dean of Students

assessment. It is based on observable behaviors compiled from multiple sources and reviewed by a trained assessment team. Chances are your campus has some version of such a team in place. It's a good idea to find out and familiarize yourself with the processes and individuals on your campus. These are your best resources in an emergency. You hope you'll never need them, but it's best to know how to find them, just in case.

The good news is that most disruptions never get that far, especially if you cultivate habits and practices to deal with milder behaviors as they happen.

As soon as it is evident that a student's behavior is disruptive, address it. Be specific in describing the disruptive behavior and offer alternative methods of dealing with the cause of the behavior. It is usually enough to call the student's attention to it. If the student understands your concerns and demonstrates an appropriate change of behavior, acknowledge it. Document both the behavior and the subsequent meeting for your own records.

If the disruptive behavior continues, you may wish to consult with a colleague, supervisor, department chair, counselor, dean of students, or other individuals on your campus in a position to offer assistance and support. Repeated disruptive behavior must be met with a more formalized approach that includes clear limit-setting and consequences for continuing the behavior. Depending on the circumstances, you may need formal intervention or emergency assistance as well.

Student behavior can be just as different as students are themselves. Over- or under-reacting almost always leads to further problems. To know how best to respond to the behavior, first categorize it. We have identified five levels of disruptive behaviors and outlined appropriate responses to each.

Naïve disruptions include students answering a cell phone, passing notes, muttering to oneself or a neighbor, and similar behaviors during class. The important thing is to address them immediately. Provide a clear, concise, constructive, non-belittling instructional directive: "It's time to stop that now." or "That is disruptive." If possible, refer to classroom rules or codes of conduct you've created together or defined in your syllabus. Make a note of the behavior and your directive immediately after class.

Usually, that's all it will take. If the behavior persists, however—even after you've called it to the student's attention—you can assume it is intentional.

Intentional disruptions include persistent questions or arguments and attention-getting or derisive comments. Repeat your directive if necessary, and this time add clarification and



A few simple steps you can take to prepare yourself in advance.

Know your resources

- Familiarize yourself with your university's student code of conduct and cite it on your syllabus.
- Find out who to turn to on your campus for emergencies, threat assessment, and support.
- Keep emergency phone numbers handy.

Use your resources

- Address disruptive behaviors immediately, and call for help whenever necessary. The sooner the behaviors are addressed, the greater the likelihood for a solution that works for the student, the faculty member, and the university.

Practice situational awareness

- Carry a cell phone or know where the nearest emergency phone is located.
- If you meet with a disruptive student outside of class, stay in public places and ask a colleague to join you.
- Pay attention to details and make notes immediately after all disruptive incidents.

consequences: “*Your side comments are disruptive. I expect you to listen respectfully when others are speaking and to follow our classroom discussion rules.*” “*Please see me after class and we’ll talk about this further.*” “*I’m sure you want to do the right thing.*” Hold your after-class conference in an open space, possibly with a third person in attendance. State what will happen if the behavior persists; depending on your campus policies, the student may be referred to the dean’s office or temporarily restricted from attending class. Document the behavior and this follow-up conference, noting dates, times, and others in attendance.

Challenging behaviors are similar to intentional disruptions, but with a slightly more aggressive or personal edge. They include questioning your position, credentials, “unreasonable expectations,” or grading policies. When the content of the challenge changes from the topic to you, it’s time to call for backup. Set and enforce limits on these behaviors with immediate directives. Get help from a colleague, department chair, counselor, or dean. Meet with the student during a break, after class, or some other time, and document that meeting thoroughly. A counselor or the dean of students may find it effective for the student to enter into a behavioral agreement in order for him or her to continue participating in the class.

Refusals. Occasionally, a student may refuse to stop the behavior, or may be unwilling or unable to follow the directive. If a student refuses to comply with your directive, it’s time to initiate a class break. During the break, inform the student that he or she must leave class and may not return until after meeting with you (or you and a colleague or some other person you specify, such as the dean of students).



Address disruptive behaviors immediately. Clear and concise instructional directives are your first line of defense.

Level 1 (naïve disruptions): State your expectation for termination of the behavior. Use constructive comments that do not belittle the student. Refer to previously established classroom rules. Make a note of the exchange.

Level 2 (intentional disruptions): Set limits and state consequences for continued disruptions. Meet with student after class or during office hours (in a public place). Document the exchange.

Level 3 (challenging behaviors): Stay on topic; don’t get pulled into the fray. Give immediate and specific directive with consequences. Meet with student after class or during office hours (in a public place). Get help from a colleague, department chair, counselor, dean of students, or other campus resource. Document the exchange.

Level 4 (refusal): Set and enforce limits. Initiate a class break. During the break, inform the student that he or she may not return to class until after meeting with you or other university authorities and getting permission. After the situation is under control, document the incident and inform the appropriate authority on your campus.

Level 5 (intimidations and/or threats): Get away from the student. Have a colleague escort you to safety if possible. Notify your university police. After the situation is under control, document the incident and inform the appropriate authority on your campus.

“Doing _____ during class is continuing to be disruptive. I asked you to stop and you refused. Therefore, you may not attend this class again until you meet with the dean of students and receive permission.”

Know where the nearest phone is, and have your emergency phone numbers handy in case you need them. After the situation is under control, document it, and notify the appropriate university authority.

Intimidating or threatening behaviors are the worst-case scenario. “If you know what’s best for you, you’ll give me an A.” “Watch out. I know what your car looks like.” If you receive threats like these, immediately get away from the student, get another faculty or staff person to escort you to safety, and notify campus security or police. This response will be easier if you have a plan in mind before you need it. Apply a little situational awareness beforehand by noting the staff offices and telephones nearest to your classroom. Know the phone numbers for emergency personnel, or have them handy on your cell phone or in your briefcase.

You’ll have to judge these situations on a case-by-case basis, but it is usually a good idea to try conversation first. Careful listening and courteous dialogue—perhaps with participation by a department chair or student conduct administrator—will often resolve the problem. At a minimum, the discussion may prove valuable in any subsequent threat assessment process.

Please do not give assurances of confidentiality. A student who appears to pose a threat to self or others needs to be referred for help and supervision. College teachers should not abrogate their traditional role as guides and mentors, but they must not assume the responsibilities of therapists or police officers.

Research on violence prevention suggest schools and colleges need more cross-generation contact. According to the NRC report, “The insularity of adolescent society serves to magnify slights and reinforce social hierarchies; correspondingly, it is only through exchange with trusted adults that teens can reach the longer-term view that can come with maturity.” As one teacher has put it, “the only real way of preventing school violence is to get into their heads and their hearts.”

The best way to get inside students heads and hearts is through deeper levels of engagement. Many students value meaningful conversations with their faculty, both inside and outside of class. More than ever before, faculty members are in the best position to understand a student’s unique situation and to connect him or her with appropriate campus resources.

Campus Violence: FAQs

How dangerous is college teaching?

Not very. Violent crime victimization rates for sample occupations (per 1,000 people) include:

College/university employees: 1.6
Physicians: 16.2
Retail sales: 20
Junior high teachers: 54.2
Mental health professionals: 68.2
Police officers: 260.8

Source: *Violence in the Workplace*, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001

How frequent are homicides on campus?

Still pretty rare.

National average: 5.6 per 100,000 people (2001-2004)
College campuses: 1.5 per 100,000 people (2001-2004)

Source: *U.S. News and World Report*, April 30, 2007

How common is suicide?

Multiple studies have found that college students commit suicide at half the rate of their nonstudent peers:

College students: 7.5 per 100,000
National average (sample matched for age, race, and gender): 15 per 100,000

Source: *Silverman et al, The Big Ten Student Suicide Study: a 10-year study of suicides on Midwestern university campuses*, *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* 27[3]:285-303, 1997.

PAUSING FOR REFLECTION

Respecting the Silence

You open the discussion with a provocative question. Your class just stares at you or looks at the floor. No one says a word. In panic, you leap in and answer it yourself.

Has this ever happened to you? The answer is probably yes. Silence tends to make us uncomfortable, and as professors we're pretty good at filling conversational voids. But our textbook authors warned us against it. "Do this even once," say Brookfield and Preskill, "and you let students know they can rely on you to answer the question and do their thinking for them."

Reflective silence may be as important to good discussion as the most animated speech. Students need processing time to consider new ideas and material and to formulate their own responses. Silence gives us time to stumble on relationships between ideas and to notice omissions and fallacies we might otherwise miss. It also can keep us from speaking too quickly in frustration or anger. Silence does not indicate a vacuum; there may be a different but equally significant engagement going on.

You might try deliberately introducing periods of silence into a lecture to demonstrate that it's OK to stop and think before responding. Silence can also be a useful backup strategy for surprising moments. "Let's all take a minute just to think about that," you might say, and then use that minute to plan your own response.

It sounds easy enough, but in practice it is much harder to respect the silence and refrain from filling it with more talk. "Far too many teachers think that if they're not speaking, they're not working," say Brookfield and Preskill. "But if good teaching means helping students learn, staying quiet is sometimes the best thing we can do."



A technique that encourages reflection and allows discussion participants to plan their responses.

Do

- Allow silence to exist without filling it yourself or panicking.
- Introduce a minute of silence now and then during lectures or discussions to allow everyone—yourself included—to mull things over and plan their next response.

Don't

- Answer your own questions too quickly.
- Mistake silence for "dead air" or disengagement. Discussions are not performances, and the most talkative are not the only ones with ideas.
- Assume that those who speak more are learning more.

Adapted from Brookfield and Preskill, *Discussion as a Way of Teaching*

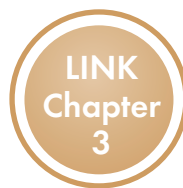
I introduced the technique of silence in all of my classes. I hoped students would use the silent period to think about what they wanted to communicate. I also hoped that it would give students who normally didn't speak an opportunity to express themselves.

The technique worked well for the first goal, as those who spoke after the silence spoke more slowly and often with well-formed ideas. It didn't work for the second goal, however, as none of my quiet students ever took advantage of the aftermath of silence to speak voluntarily.

I discovered an even more productive way to use silence in my Anthropology of Art course. In this course, I want students to move beyond text (spoken or written) to think and communicate about visual cultural expressions. I broke the students into pairs and told them not to speak aloud to each other. Instead, they were to communicate by drawing iconic symbols to each other. Then I had the pairs form larger groups with at least one other pair and attempt to speak aloud the other pair's communication. Finally, the mid-sized groups formed two larger groups, and this time I asked students one at a time to "read" the conversation of at least one other person.

Surprisingly, the laconic students were equally laconic with drawings as they were with the spoken word. Nevertheless, everyone participated. All of the students' work was understandable by people on the other side of the room and, better yet, everyone had a chance to speak both in drawing and with their voices.

Phyllis Fast
Anthropology



Silence also honors the fact that many students come from cultural backgrounds in which constantly filling the air with speech is frowned upon and speaking slowly, with deliberateness and only when necessary, is rewarded. These students may have a hard time negotiating a class in which others rapidly fill each pause with comments or arguments. For more on culturally responsive teaching, see Chapter 3.

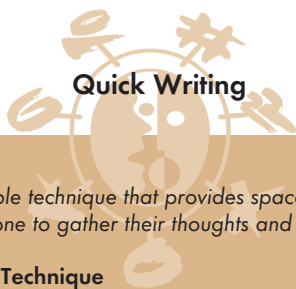
Reflective Writing

Reflective writing helps students organize their thinking before entering into a discussion. The exercises give students time to consider their responses, decide how and whether to take a stance, and plan how they want to express themselves. The act of writing requires stepping back and thinking about the question, taking their personal responses and the likely reactions of others into account.

You can prompt reflective writing through a variety of techniques such as quick writing, shared writing, and mini-journals. These exercises may or may not be collected by the instructor, but if they are, they should not be graded for writing quality or for grammar, punctuation, or correctness. Students should feel free to express themselves without the pressure of judgment, either from instructors or their peers.

Quick Writes are among the simplest and most effective techniques for involving all students in the discussion, even the shy ones or those reluctant to speak for cultural or other reasons. The instructor provides a prompt, and everyone takes five or ten minutes to respond in writing before addressing the question in open discussion. Shared writing (see page 200) is a variation in which students pass their initial Quick Write to one or more other students in the group and do a second or third Quick Write in response. Other variations ask students to read their Quick Write aloud and invite oral comments before having the last word themselves. Journals are useful variations that students can do outside of class in response to assigned readings or activities. You can prompt them to pull out questions for discussion or surprises they encounter in the reading, and then in class to share those items with their discussion groups.

Like silence, reflective writing can also be a terrific backup strategy for those moments when something surprising happens and you find yourself at a temporary loss for how to proceed. In spite of our best intentions and most meticulous preparation, sometimes things will erupt without warning. In these cases, having several backup strategies in mind will help buy time so you can direct a more productive response. “That’s an interesting idea,” you might say. “Let’s take five minutes and reflect on what makes it so.”



Quick Writing

A simple technique that provides space between a question and its possible answers, and allows everyone to gather their thoughts and express themselves privately before joining a discussion.

Basic Technique

Provide the group with a prompting question and allow a few minutes for everyone to respond in writing.

Begin the discussion with the same or a similar question and invite people to share what they wrote.

Tip: If you collect the quick writes, do not grade them for grammar, punctuation, strength of argument, or other kind of “quality” criteria. Students should feel free to express themselves without performance concerns.

I used Quick Writes to support a fairly typical term paper assignment on social change. Early in the semester, before their topics were due, I asked students to write a short paragraph that would describe their proposed topic to a reference librarian. After six minutes, they broke into pairs and described their topics to each other. Their topics ranged from the entitlements of baby boomers to the use of hip-hop to promote social change.

The second Quick Write took place two weeks before the final project was due. We had been reading Malcolm Gladwell's *The Tipping Point* and discussing the role of human agency in social change, and I wanted them to apply these ideas to the topics they were researching. For the writing exercise, I projected a series of questions on a PowerPoint slide: Has anyone put the principle of "focus, test, and believe" into effect to bring about the change you are writing about? Who has been involved? How has the message been focused? Have the results been tested? Who originally believed the change could happen?

We followed the second exercise with a guided discussion to develop a simple outline and arguments for two of the papers. The Quick Writes were successful at helping students apply concepts about human agency and social change to specific real-life situations. The discussions helped students focus their research more productively. As they considered together the semester-long projects of their fellow students, they redirected each other's research and opened up new avenues of thought. The results were richer, more focused papers.

Ann Jache
Sociology



Practitioners of reflective writing techniques often swear by them. Dr. Virginia Juetner credits reflective writing with creating an atmosphere conducive to productive discussion. See page 194. Dr. Leslie Cornick credits journal writing with helping to transform students. See page 234.

BALANCING SAFETY AND RISK

It can be tricky to balance student comfort and safety with the educator's imperative to present challenging ideas and to honor multiple points of view. Conflict is unavoidable, but if managed effectively it can add energy to the classroom, increase student engagement, and promote critical thinking about important problems and issues. This essay offers classroom tips for finding and maintaining the balance between safety and risk while promoting positive personal outcomes.

What Instructors Can Do to Safely Facilitate Controversial Discussion

Bettina Kipp

*Assistant Professor of Counseling
Kenai Peninsula College*

One of the central paradoxes in teaching can be summed up like this: The classroom must be safe, but it must also be risky. It is not always easy to create that balance between student comfort and safety and the necessary spirit of challenge that leads to the most productive discussions. Students who are uncomfortable with conflict or with having their point of view challenged may sit silent—or worse, feel offended—without the tools to open their experience for discussion. But it's also true that avoiding controversial ideas (in the often well-meaning spirit of “we don't go there”) inhibits student expression and creates an atmosphere unsuited for debate. Where is the magic line between the two, and how can the balance be sustained?

Everything that is important can be narrowed down to a personal outcome for someone. To value education is to value each student's personal outcome. Of course, each individual, students and teachers alike, bears the greatest responsibility for his/her personal experience in any endeavor, but as educators, it is our desire to provide the best learning environment we can. This is quite a task in a single class, consisting of students ranging in age from 18-67, male and female, with a wide range of religious and political views. Add in the variations in students' emotional maturity and styles of handling conflict, and promoting a positive personal outcome for all seems impossible.

Adding these tips to the many different strategies and techniques for engaging controversy may help instructors to find that magic balance.

- Establish the tone right from the beginning. Set up class discussion rules on Day 1 (Codes of Conduct, page 12).
- Explain the process and define roles: *“Respecting the comfort level of each student is important to me. And promoting active debate, especially on controversial subjects, is important for the best learning experience in the class. My job is to manage time so the material is covered, to promote discussion, and to remind everyone of the class rules that all of you have established. Your job is to participate, and to actively communicate with the class and with me. If you feel uncomfortable for any reason, please let the class know, or let me know privately; that is also OK.”*

- Notice students' discomfort when it is observable. Check with students who seem to be having an uncomfortable experience after class if you can; and remind students frequently of your accessibility.
- Be conscious of the example you are setting. Examine your own personal style and responses. Ask yourself: How do I handle challenges in class? What values do I display when I am feeling defensive or confronted? Do I handle conflict in a way that demonstrates the best possible response that I want from my students? Do I achieve a nondefensive posture that shows appreciation of others' ideas and efforts to communicate, even when I disagree or do not intend to comply?
- Manage proactively. At the first moment when you realize that a controversial issue is becoming emotional for the class, stop the discussion for a few seconds to remind the class of the class rules that have been established.
- As the instructor, you get to, and sometimes must, interrupt. Always interrupt politely: *"This is a great discussion so far, and I am sorry to interrupt, but we need to switch gears slightly at this point so we can be sure that the other sides of the issue are covered."*
- Be alert to differences in students' communication styles, and offer direct and open opportunities for all to speak: *"This has been a great debate. Now I would like to close the floor to all who have already stated positions, and open the floor to those who have not yet given their thoughts."*
- Skip to solutions. When "who-caused-the-problem" discussions begin to circle (students are taking turns repeating their opinions), switch the discussion to ways to solve it.
- Be overt in your techniques. Explain when class rules are established that you may sometimes interrupt the class to switch gears for purposes of time or to remind them of the rules. Acknowledge that you, too, sometimes feel uncomfortable with debate and confrontation, but that you view the practice as a learning experience and that you want students to tell you when they are uncomfortable.
- State your internal text out loud (explain to students where you are coming from): *"Wow, this is obviously an important topic to folks. I appreciate that we have strong convictions, and it's OK that conversation gets energetic. Everyone is remembering our class rules, which I also appreciate! Now let's move from the potential sources of the problem to solutions. Without debating merit, let's just throw some ideas up on the board."*

Be alert to differences in students' communication styles, and offer direct and open opportunities for all to speak.

- Be overt in your general responses to challenge (when you feel challenged by a student). Another example of overt communication: *“I think I am feeling on the spot at this moment! Please give me a little time to think about this. I do want to respond in a way that will be best for the learning experience of the class. Hmmm.”*
- Offer supportive follow-up talks with specific instructions to students after a particularly heated debate: *“Everyone, please remember that I have office hours today and tomorrow from 9-10:30. I invite anyone who would like to talk about the topic, or the experience you had today in the classroom, to come see me to chat privately. And remember, you can also always e-mail me your thoughts and any concerns you have; my e-mail address is on the syllabus. And thanks, everyone, for your participation in discussing these difficult subjects.”*
- Debrief with faculty colleagues after challenging classes. Sometimes a chat with a supportive colleague can give us valuable feedback and the perspective we need to rally our energy for the next class.

Conflict may feel uncomfortable, and many people try to avoid it for this reason. Despite its sometimes uncomfortable presence, conflict is both unavoidable and potentially beneficial. Controversial discussion adds energy and motivation to the classroom; heightens awareness and increases student engagement, and gives us as instructors opportunities to encourage the development of critical thinking skills and potentially new solutions to societal issues.

Be aware of your own personal style and responses. Ask yourself: How do I handle challenges in class? What values do I display when I am feeling defensive or confronted?



Well-run classroom discussions can be so rewarding that they create a new problem of their own: how to stop them. See page 229-230 for a few tips for controlling the duration of a discussion without dampening classroom enthusiasm.

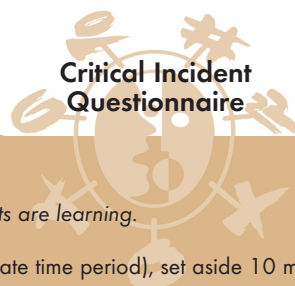
DIFFICULT DIALOGUE

MEETING LEARNER EXPECTATIONS

We had a few firestorms in the first faculty intensive, and they started early, on day one. All day long, Libby could feel the tension in the room rise, but she didn't really know where all of it was coming from. So, at the end of the day, she asked participants to complete a Critical Incident Questionnaire. They wrote some passionate responses which she read that night.

As described by Brookfield and Preskill, a Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ) is an anonymous way to find out from our students what's really going on in the classroom. Used once a week, once a month, after a particularly difficult day, or whenever the need arises, it gives us feedback we need to hear about course content, presentation, minority voices, dominant cultures, and much more. At the same time it gives us a chance to model the kinds of active learning behaviors we hope to teach our students.

No one really likes criticism, especially if it's in public. But by acknowledging criticism and openly discussing the particulars of it, we can model for our students the very qualities we are trying to teach them: a respect for new information and feedback, a willingness to listen and learn, and a habit of discourse that engages rather than avoids difficult truths.



A simple evaluation tool to find out what and how students are learning.

At the end of the day (or week, or unit, or other appropriate time period), set aside 10 minutes for the group to respond in writing to a few specific questions:

- At what moment were you most engaged as a learner?
- At what moment were you most distanced as a learner?
- What action that anyone in the room took did you find most affirming or helpful?
- What action that anyone in the room took did you find most puzzling or confusing?
- What surprised you most?

Keep all responses anonymous. Collect them at the end of the period.

Read and analyze the responses, and compile them according to similar themes and concerns.

Report back to the group at the next meeting. Allow time for comments and discussion.

*Adapted from Brookfield and Preskill, *Discussion as a Way of Teaching**

We had planned the intensive to focus primarily on positive, proactive approaches to introducing controversial topics in the classroom. However, based on the number of seriously negative incidents UAA faculty members reported in their applications, we decided to address these concerns and fears first, so folks didn't feel like they needed to keep bringing them up throughout the week. As a result, much of the first day involved techniques that addressed negative possibilities, threatening situations, and disruptive students. We hoped the arrangement would free us up to spend the rest of the week exploring proactive ways of working with conflict in the classroom.

"I thought I had adequately explained our rationale," says Libby, "but the CIQ responses told a different story." Some participants were disturbed by the tone of the day and concerned that it would continue throughout the week. In addition, because we had not sufficiently emphasized our desire for highly interactive presentations, many of our first day's presenters delivered their material by formal

lectures, accompanied by PowerPoint slides. About half the participants liked those teaching styles, but the rest did not. On top of this, the textbook had been written by two white males, which made some people (who had yet to read it) wonder how culturally relevant the week would turn out to be. A few were operating on misinformation that made them distrust the intentions of some of the presenters. And perhaps worst of all, much of the content seemed to be focused almost exclusively on only one of the partner universities. Participants from the other, already a minority in numbers, felt marginalized.

The next morning, Libby reported back to the group, they discussed these issues, and she began making adjustments. After that, we had fewer static

lectures and more interactive practice. We revamped the agenda for future intensives to start working together sooner on difficult dialogues of our own, and to be far more explicit in our introductory description of how the week would unfold.

Libby now likes to take a few minutes early on the first day to warn participants about what will follow.

"This is going to be an intense week," she says. "We're going to try a lot of different things, and not all of them will perfectly match your interests, learning styles, or particular classroom needs. But please remember that what is tough for you may work for someone else and vice versa. That's why all the research suggests that varying what you do in the classroom reaches more students. Experience shows that faculty learners are a lot like student learners in this regard, responding well to certain approaches and resisting or disengaging from others. This week will model some best practices for classroom teaching and introduce us to a range of approaches for proactively engaging difficult topics in the classroom. It will also give you a chance to remember what it is like to be a learner wrestling with new or uncomfortable material. Welcome to your class."

Lesson learned? Your students may disagree with or be confused about what you say or do, but you can't always tell that—or understand the sources of the problem—just by looking at them. However, they will often write these things down in an anonymous way, and it really helps you tailor what to do next.

Libby Roderick, Facilitator
Center for Advancing Faculty Excellence

START TALKING

Questions for Discussion:

Do you have any of your own Tales from the Trenches, difficult classroom experiences that you wish you could do over?

What does academic freedom mean to you?

What is your preferred teaching style?

What styles engage you most as a learner?

How often do you take risks in the classroom, and how do you know whether they are successful?

How do you typically handle disruptive students, and how do you think you could improve your response?

Rhetoric, Debate

*Rhetorics hail us, position us, subject us,
put us in our places and not others...
Rhetorics are temporary, historical, local...
provisionary rules of order and
disorder...made to be broken. We need
new rhetorics (not a new rhetoric)...
that search for their margins, silences,
denials...that acknowledge their
own compliance in the impositions
of discursive dominions...that give us
new voices, new listeners, new words,
new languages.*

James Berlin

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FACULTY INTENSIVE

Day Two

We spent the second day of our intensives exploring the Western traditions of rhetoric, argument, and debate. The practices of the Academy have been deeply informed by these traditions. They form the foundation of many writing and communication courses, adapt easily to a wide range of content, and translate effectively across a wide range of disciplines. They are, as English Professor Daniel Kline suggests in Chapter 4, the “scientific method” of the humanities: time-honored and highly structured ways to disagree about complicated issues.

We have several experts amongst us, and we’ve drawn heavily on them to remind the rest of us what the ancient Greeks were on to. English Professor Kerri Morris and Academic Dean Marilyn Barry explain the rhetorical principles behind a classroom exercise and a series of writing assignments. Professor Steven Johnson introduces the parameters and formats of structured debate. Professor Jacqueline Cason describes a collaborative research and performance assignment modeled after the format of a favorite public radio program.

There are numerous technical terms in this chapter, and some of them (ethos, pathos, logos, stasis) sound suspiciously like ancient history. But the considerations they suggest are as relevant as this morning’s news.

- What questions can be productively discussed?
- When can we agree to disagree?
- How do we consider multiple sides of a complicated issue?
- What kinds of evidence, argument, and testimony will move an audience?

What’s to be learned from these venerable old strategies? As it turns out, quite a lot.

Sample Agenda

- Debrief from previous day: comments from Critical Incident Questionnaire.
- Exercise: Questions and Categories
- Presentation: Lessons from the Greeks
- Reflection and Discussion
- Presentation: Debate as a Tool for Engaging Controversy
- Reflection and Discussion

SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE

What are Rhetorics and Why Do They Matter?

If you rely on a dictionary to define rhetoric, you will probably understand it as the effective use of language to persuade. You will think of it as a singular term and you will imagine that those who teach it are mostly concerned with elements of style and structure in speaking and writing. By most simple dictionary accounts, rhetoric is a technique or skill.

But if you look further, to the numerous books, articles, Internet blogs, and postings from scholars in the field, you will begin to understand that rhetoric is not a simple thing to define at all. In fact, the nature of rhetoric has been argued about since its inception as a field of study in the fifth century BCE. As great thinkers have attempted to define and clarify it, rhetoric has been referred to variously as a knack, a skill, a technique, an art, a method, a theory, a form of mental and emotional energy, and a way to make meaning. As you dig deeper and read the works of great thinkers such as the Sophists, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, Augustine, Boethius, de Pizan, Erasmus, Bacon, Locke, Hume, Nietzsche, Toulmin, and Cixous to name a few, you may come to agree with the authors of *The Rhetorical Tradition* who say that rhetoric is “a complex discipline with a long history: It is less helpful to try to define it once and for all than to look at the many definitions it has accumulated over the years and to attempt to understand how each arose and how each still inhabits and shapes the field.”¹

Classical Views

Let rhetoric be defined as an ability in each particular case to see the available means of persuasion.

Aristotle

...because there has been implanted in us the power to persuade each other and to make clear to each other whatever we desire, not only have we escaped the life of wild beasts, but we have come together and founded cities and made laws and invented arts...

Isocrates

¹ Bizzell and Herzberg, p.1

Definitions and conceptions differ primarily because of their scope. Some define rhetoric in relatively limited terms as a theorized system that provides practical guidelines for composing and delivering persuasive discourse. At the other extreme are those for whom rhetoric includes all forms of communication, textual and visual. Virtually all conceptions share certain features as well, including the search for knowledge and a concern with political action.²

For the purposes of this handbook on bringing difficult dialogues into the classroom, we ask that you understand rhetoric as an academic discipline or field of study—a branch of knowledge or learning—concerned with discourse, knowledge production and consumption, textual and symbolic communication and their effects, and the complexities of language and experience. We ask that you understand rhetoric as a form of inquiry rather than a fixed body of knowledge that only prescribes guidelines.

Practicing rhetoric means applying rhetorical theory, and understanding theory begins with understanding its terms. We invite you to become acquainted with a few of these terms.



For a more expanded discussion of key rhetorical terms as they apply to an extended composition assignment, see also page 73.

² Bizzell and Herzberg, p.16

Speaking the Language

Dissoi Logoi: an ancient pedagogy that insists upon active and performed engagement with multiple perspectives.

Ethos: arguments provided by a person's reputation or through the person's words that appeal to the listener's or reader's sense of fair-mindedness and good will.

Invention: the process of finding available arguments.

Kairos: the right time and place to do something.

Logos: arguments found by examining the issue at hand. Typically, they are based on premises that lead to a conclusion, thus appealing to the listener's or reader's sense of things "adding up" or seeming reasonable.

Pathos: arguments found by considering common human experiences. Typically, they appeal to the listener's or reader's emotions.

Rhetoric: ancient art used to make decisions, resolve disputes, and mediate public discussions of important issues.

Stasis: a point of contention between sides engaged in a conflict or dispute.

RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

This exercise invites students to uncover the hidden categories upon which their opinions may be based. As they identify and group the underlying issues by category, they may come to recognize the inevitable conflicts among their own values. As they discuss with a partner, they may discover how others define the same issues differently.

Question Yourself

Directions:

For the following list of questions, you should first decide whether you want to answer “yes” or “no,” and then evaluate how sure you are about your answer:

1 = confident; 2 = fairly sure; 3 = less sure; 4 = quite ambivalent

Example:

Should students in public schools be required to recite the Pledge of Allegiance?

Yes___ No__1__

If you responded this way, it would mean that you do not think students should be required to recite the Pledge and that you are confident about your answer.

QUESTIONS

1. Should politicians, who often have inside information, be allowed to withhold that information when they believe it is for the public good? Yes_____ No_____
2. Should students in public schools be required to recite the Pledge of Allegiance? Yes_____ No_____
3. If a doctor learns that one of her patients has a communicable disease, should she be required to tell the patient’s spouse? Yes_____ No_____
4. Should employees of a public institution be allowed to hold religious meetings on site during their lunch hour? Yes_____ No_____
5. Should a college professor have the right to assign students to attend a lecture by a particular politician? Yes_____ No_____
6. Should the wolf population be controlled (via aerial shooting, for instance) to preserve moose and caribou for sports and subsistence hunters? Yes_____ No_____
7. Should a man be required to pay child support for his biological child if the woman failed to inform him of her pregnancy? Yes_____ No_____

8. Should persons with a criminal record be required to reveal that record on a job application?
Yes_____ No_____
9. Should newspaper reporters be required to reveal their sources of information when government or law enforcement agencies believe it is in the public interest for them to do so?
Yes_____ No_____
10. Should a priest be required to inform the police when a parishioner reveals an intention to commit a murder or other serious crime? Yes_____ No_____
11. Should wives be required to inform their husbands before terminating a pregnancy?
Yes_____ No_____
12. Should students be allowed to tape a lecture without informing the professor?
Yes_____ No_____
13. Should businesses be allowed to solicit individuals over the telephone? Yes_____ No_____
14. Should a professor be allowed to discuss his personal, political or religious preferences in class? Yes_____ No_____
15. Should governments be allowed to keep secrets from the people? Yes_____ No_____
16. Should sex offenders' names be posted publicly on a Web site? Yes_____ No_____
17. Should companies be allowed to test employees for drugs, even if the employee is not involved in a hazardous job? Yes_____ No_____
18. Should a girl be punished as severely for hitting a boy as a boy would be for hitting a girl, assuming both children were between ages 14 and 17? Yes_____ No_____
19. Should a woman be given preference for a job over a man if all other qualifications are equal? Yes_____ No_____
20. Should some U.S. citizens be exempt from fighting in a war because they do not agree with the issues being fought for? Yes_____ No_____
21. Should Southern states, Alabama for instance, be allowed to fly the Confederate flag from official state buildings? Yes_____ No_____
22. Should cameras be allowed in court during trials? Yes_____ No_____
23. Should businesses be expected to preserve natural resources even if it costs them money?
Yes_____ No_____
24. Should smokers be allowed to smoke in public outdoor places? Yes_____ No_____
25. Should professors at public institutions be required to adhere to ethics policies that prohibit sexual relationships with students? Yes_____ No_____



Physics professor Dr. Travis Rector adapted this technique to accompany a class research project that gives students a chance to learn about the nature of scientific research, the importance of perspective, and the difference between what we want to be true and what is actually true. See page 144.



Questions and Categories

An exercise that reveals the categories of thinking behind our opinions on specific issues.

Question Yourself

Distribute your questionnaire and allow 10 minutes for students to respond according to the instructions (answering yes or no for each item, with a confidence scale of 1-4).

Make Categories

Have students work alone to develop several categories (at least four, no more than six or seven) among which the questions could be sorted. Then have them place each of the questions in one category (one only).

Notice Disagreements

Have students compare their answers with a partner. Note every question with different answers and notice the intensity of the disagreement. On which question did they have the strongest disagreement?

Start Talking

Have students discuss the questions where they had the most disagreement. What categories did each create for this question? Why did they argue the way they did?

Change your Mind

Allow students to change their answers and then ask them to explain why. How did their partner's answers or categories influence them?

This exercise was developed by Professor Kerri Morris and her associates in graduate school at Texas Christian University.

This essay links the Questions and Categories exercise to the rhetorical principles of invention and kairos. Invention helps us clarify our own thinking and discover how others think about a topic. Kairos refers to the specific situation in need of deliberation. Both are necessary elements for developing effective arguments and making effective decisions in a democracy.

Rhetoric and the Method of Democracy

Dr. Kerri Morris

*Associate Professor of English
University of Alaska Anchorage*

Should governments keep secrets? Should professors discuss their political preferences in class? Should we kill wolves so there will be more caribou and moose to hunt?

The Questions and Categories exercise invites us to think about these and other potentially controversial issues from a rhetorical perspective that involves two important concepts: invention (the discovery and development of effective arguments) and kairos (specific situations that would benefit from deliberation at this point in time).

Invention is the word Aristotle uses to describe the rational strategies we use to develop and to discover arguments. Said differently, invention is the process we use to build good arguments before we deliberate about them. The list below is not exhaustive, but it provides some examples of the sort of thought that rhetorical arguments require and the kinds of information invention can lead us to:

- Discovery of our opponents' arguments.
- Awareness of the historical background about our issue.
- Understanding of the implications and effects that our arguments will have.

This knowledge prepares us to shape our arguments appropriately for the occasions, audiences, and purposes that we encounter.

Rhetoric deals in specifics. Rhetorical arguments find their homes in the public spaces of democracies, where citizens with diverse values and beliefs gather to shape public policies. Citizenship demands that we allow competing versions of the truth to inform our laws and policies, without requiring that individuals surrender their beliefs about truth. We can, consequently, provide space for individuals to believe that abortion is immoral while at the same time produce a law that allows sixteen-year-old girls to have an abortion without notifying a parent.

The Questions and Categories exercise presents a series of situations and asks students to engage in the process of invention to discover how they and others think about them. The act of grouping issues systematically by category helps to distance students from their first—and perhaps easiest—answers. In order to complete this task, students must define issues, and through conversation with a partner find out how differently another person defines those same issues. The discussion encourages participants to think about the values upon which their own opinions may be based, to consider that values are sometimes in conflict, and to discuss those conflicts with others.

In practice, my students have frequently discovered that their own values conflict. One question asks: should tobacco companies be free to advertise their products in the newspaper? This question

can be viewed through the lens of public safety, free speech, economics, and no doubt many others as well. It's possible to believe, for example, both that public safety should be protected and also that tobacco companies should have the freedom to advertise their product. The key is to decide which value is more important in this instance: public safety or freedom of speech.

Through discussion in pairs and as a large group, the class will have an opportunity to grapple with the concept of gray areas and the inevitable conflicts between and among our values. In addition, over the years students have consistently resisted answering general questions without filling in some details. They move almost immediately into specific examples, illustrating through their own experience the nature of rhetoric. Thus, the project is one model through which students can engage in invention and learn to focus on specific issues rather than on general principles or truths.

Rhetorical Background

Almost every student I meet is new to the field of rhetoric, so a brief theoretical background is helpful for them to understand why I ask them to write arguments about particular topics, to use certain

Invention

- Discover arguments to use
- Uncover arguments your opponents might use
- Know the history of the problem
- Understand the implications of your argument

forms of arrangement, and to prepare their research-based inquiry in certain ways. Rhetoric is, ultimately, the art of arguing for specific policies or judgments based upon deliberation with others and with awareness that our arguments and our judgments are not final. Rhetorical argument is ongoing and is one method for making decisions in a democracy.

The five principles below are good places to start for rhetorical background.

Rhetoric requires that we establish a need for the argument. Rhetoric is called for when a conflict or problem needs deliberation and thought; we might even call a good argument a “rhetorical intervention.” During a time of peace, for example, it would be entirely theoretical (and not rhetorical) to discuss the

validity of going to war. However, our involvement in Iraq, a specific conflict with a specific historical and political context, needs deliberation. The disciplinary term is *kairos*, which literally means the opportune moment. While some critics have considered this as an example of rhetoric's manipulative character, rhetoricians understand *kairos* as a moment in which deliberation and rhetorical argument are helpful, called for, and necessary. Rhetoricians do not advocate arguing because of its inherent benefits—although many of us believe that arguments are inherently beneficial—but rather because of its instrumental benefits. Rhetorical argument helps us accomplish the decision-making tasks that deliberative situations demand.

Rhetoric demands that we understand our audience. Those who hear our arguments are as important to the rhetorical situation as are the facts and details about the case. We have to be familiar with the background, knowledge, and worldview of our listeners, in order to make our argument sensible to them, and in order to deliberate with them about specific issues. We must know as much about our audience as possible in order to participate in deliberation helpfully. For instance, if everyone in the room supports the policy we are advocating, we need not dwell on our argument; we may, in fact, not need to argue at all. However, if many audience members are new to the situation or to the group, we may need to provide essential background information in order to help them understand what's at stake. If the audience isn't aware that a problem exists, they may not be motivated to listen to proposed solutions.

Rhetoric argues about the practical and the particular. This is a principle with ancient history. Aristotle grouped rhetoric, ethics, and politics as arts that dealt with the practical and the particular, while philosophy dealt with more general matters. So in order to argue from the rhetorical tradition, we need to consider situations and contexts. I encourage students to start with case studies and then move to a more general level of argument. Thus, a student might begin with a specific case argument such as, “Susan should sue Toyota because her car exploded when she backed into another car, and Toyota knew that this vehicle was flawed in such a way that explosions could happen.” From there, the student could progress to the more general “Companies must take responsibility for their design flaws and should be considered criminally negligent if they have prior knowledge of dangerous problems.”

Rhetoric needs support and evidence. We cannot make a good argument without support for our perspective. It is not enough to simply state “Well, that’s my opinion.” Opinions need information to support them. If we want to argue that indoor smoking should be banned in the interest of public safety, then we must have evidence and support for the claim that second-hand smoke is harmful. We are obligated to know as much about our concerns and about their potential impact as we can. Whether we use analogies, cause and effect arguments, or statistics, we must provide reasons that our audiences can find credible.

Rhetoric is more beneficial when many sides of an argument are voiced. Our arguments should invite a response, and all parties should be able to participate in the discussion. Rhetoric flourishes in democracies, especially when minority voices are given opportunities to speak, and when majority voices are willing to hear arguments that conflict. We are more likely to make good decisions if we hear many relevant perspectives, reasons, and strategies.

Ethical Rhetoric

The term “rhetoric” has had negative connotations at least since Plato. It has been called empty and manipulative and false. Many believe that rhetoric seeks to exploit the weak, to empower the mob, and to distract society from important issues. Certainly, many people have used arguments and public platforms to accomplish all of these. The discipline of rhetoric, however, has (also since Plato’s time) been evolving into a complex method upon which democracies depend.

Scholar Kathryn M. Olson argues that an ethical practice of rhetoric should combine Aristotelian notions of effective rhetorical practice with Henry Johnstone’s “ethical imperative.”

An ethical practice of rhetoric requires that our arguments and deliberations always be ongoing, invite response, encourage listening, and limit harm.

FACULTY INTENSIVES

I presented this material three times to three different cohorts. The content was essentially the same, but each group of “students” took it in their own direction.

The first group wanted to discuss the key concepts of invention and kairos and to better understand the practical application of these disciplinary terms. The second group was intrigued by my observations about an ethical rhetoric and wanted to talk theoretically about deliberation itself. The third group wanted to talk more deeply about the topics on the questionnaire.

These experiences taught me a lot about presenting to an audience of peers. For the first cohort, I started out with a lecture and discussion on rhetoric and finished with a shortened hands-on experience with the questionnaire. Because we ran out of time, this group only got a taste of the exercise. I realized afterwards that participants would have preferred to have more time to answer the questions, assign their own categories, and talk with each other about the underlying issues: in other words, to participate. The next time, we began with the questions and finished with a shortened version of the lecture, which turned out to be a much better arrangement.

Kerri Morris
English

Duty to Self	Resoluteness	Openness
Duty to Others	Compassion	Gentleness

In this matrix, resoluteness and compassion mean:

- We have a duty to make an argument and to not be dissuaded from doing so by intimidation or by the power of another rhetorical argument; and
- We have a further duty to listen to others’ arguments for the sake of the opponents making that argument (rather than for the instrumental value to our own argument).

Openness and gentleness mean:

- We should always invite a response from our opponents; and
- We should make our own arguments only as powerful as they need be. In other words, we should not use argument to metaphorically destroy an opponent.

From this perspective (which I share), we should make effective arguments and always be committed to our duties to self and others. An ethical practice of rhetoric requires that our arguments and deliberations always be ongoing, invite response, encourage listening, and limit harm. We have an obligation both to make arguments and to invite others to make arguments. The Questions and Categories exercise extends a similar invitation.

RHETORICAL PURPOSES

Writing teachers can use argument as a rich tool for training students to engage productively in civil discourse. This essay describes a series of short writing assignments that encourage students to address the same issue or problem in five different ways. Each approach achieves a different result; together they introduce students to rhetorical considerations and strategies that underlie the construction of effective arguments.

Approaching Argument: Different Voices, Different Perspectives

Dr. Marilyn Barry

Academic Dean

Alaska Pacific University

The most civilized tool in the Western tradition for resolving disagreements is argument, a complex set of principles and conventions for engaging in intellectual and civil discourse. Argument belongs to the discipline of rhetoric, which seeks to describe how humans can communicate effectively with one another without recourse to violence. Rhetoric is at the heart of the Liberal Arts.

Classically defined, rhetoric is the art of discovering in a particular case what will likely be effective means of persuasion. It provides strategies for discovering defensible claims and for constructing effective arguments to convince a particular audience of the worthiness of those claims. To this end, the writer is well advised to consider a topic from multiple perspectives.

The students who enter our classrooms have already had years of practice in writing for teachers. They have learned that their target audience is the teacher who grades the paper; the reason for writing an essay is to fulfill an assignment and earn a grade. If we are going to pry them loose from such narrow expectations, we need to engage them early in discussions about audience. The more convinced they are that writing can be personally and professionally useful, reaching actual audiences and discourse communities, the more likely they are to learn and adopt rhetorical strategies that make for effective written communication.

I have been involved for decades in teaching students how to engage in difficult dialogues of the written variety. Argumentative writing is the kind of teaching assignment that can wear one down by sheer dint of workload. But, next to teaching Chaucer, I have come to relish Argument most of all because it's the course in which I can most openly profess the values of a liberal arts education. Ideas matter. Perspective matters. How we deal with and learn from differences in perspective, this also matters.

Marilyn Barry
Academic Dean

The Communication Triangle

Early in the term I draw on the board a Communication Triangle: that elegantly simple representation communication theorists have extrapolated from Aristotle. Each angle represents a facet of the constructed world as we express it in our pronoun system, with the total being greater than the sum of its parts:

I, the writer/speaker (for Aristotle, who the writer was and how he presented himself constituted the *ethos*; we connect this to the notion of *credibility*);

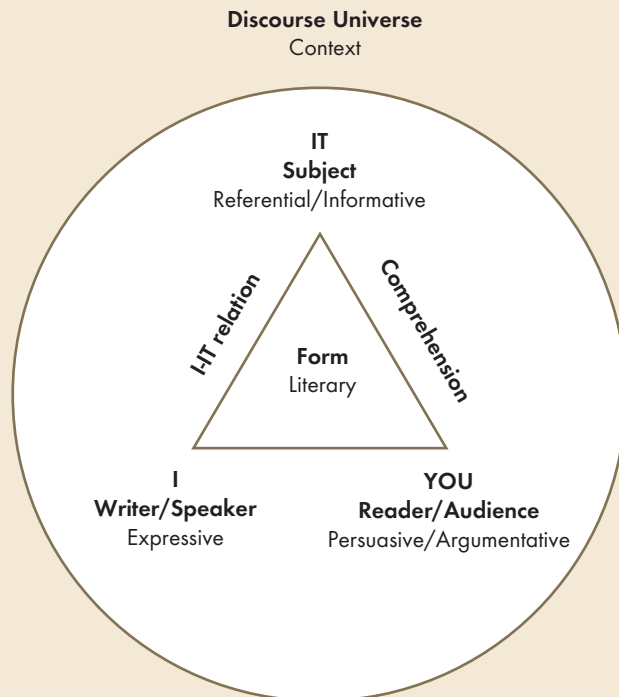
You, the reader/listener (for the Greek, the point of empathic response was called *pathos*); and

It, the topic that engages us (the *logos* implies a right relationship between the “world” under discussion and the words used to describe it).

The **literary form** itself constitutes a fourth entity; when one gives primary focus to the *form* (alternately called *message*) we may say that the author highlights the literary aspects of communication. Encircling the triangle is a circle: **the context**—the discourse universe—in which the particular piece of communication occurs.

Okay, so it’s a static representation of a discursive process that necessarily involves time and process, but it does lay out relationships that can be dramatized in the form a given piece of communication takes. As a visual model, it can get students thinking about the dialectic that two-way communication involves.

Marilyn’s version of the communication triangle corresponds closely with a systematic framework for teaching composition described by James Kinneavy in his 1971 book *A Theory of Discourse*. Kinneavy used the terms *decoder*, *encoder*, and *reality* where Marilyn uses *I*, *You*, and *It*, but the idea is the same. In this framework, examples of discourse are classified into four types: expressive, referential, persuasive, and literary. Each is linked to one aspect of the communication triangle.



Adapted from James Moffett (*Student-Centered Language Arts and Reading*) and Erika Lindemann (*A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*)

Rhetorical Purposes

Rhetoricians have sliced and diced kinds of communication in many different ways; the communication triangle reflects only one timeworn division. Still, it's a useful model, because it allows us to classify types of communication based on their intended purpose.

Where the focus of the writing/speaking event is on the writer or speaker as an individual, we call this personal or expressive writing. The forms it takes include journal writing and the personal essay, among others. When the primary interest is on an objective topic, the purpose of the writing may be termed informative or referential, because it points to something other than the writer and the reader; whether a narrative of an event, a description of flora in a biology text, or analysis of cause and effect in thermodynamics, the goal is accuracy in matching up the description to the described. If primary intent is to affect the reader, causing him or her to consider the topic under discussion differently, the purpose may be called persuasive.

When the primary intent is to persuade, the writer must produce an argument that observes a set of civilized expectations and verbal conventions with the goal of addressing and negotiating human conflict through language, our most intrinsically human capability. Effective arguments rely on a full array of rhetorical strategies. Aristotle went to the Forum to observe what worked and what didn't in spoken communication. The principles he codified are applicable to both spoken and written discourse and have been refined over time by other careful observers, whose theoretical and pragmatic suggestions have influenced those of us who care about or teach writing. Like Aristotle, we are always looking for what works and what doesn't.

Argument is a uniquely important sub-category of persuasion, one that observes a set of civilized expectations and verbal conventions with the goal of addressing and negotiating human conflict through language, our most intrinsically human capability.

Classroom Strategy

A strategy that I have used for many years to introduce argumentative writing is a riff on William Coles' exercise from *The Plural I*. A series of assignments asks students to think of a problem they'd like to resolve (an experience or situation that involves at least one other person) and moves them through a series of rhetorical tasks. The full exercise consists of five assignments, spread out over several days or class periods. Each assignment corresponds to a point of emphasis in the model triangle: personal expression; informative or referential writing (in the form of a narrative); argument (a letter written in the form of an argument); literary writing; and reflection and assessment.

The first assignment asks students to choose a situation and write about it as if it were a journal entry, allowing full play to their feelings. They know I'll read the piece, but also that they can consider it to be relatively risk-free, not subject to ordinary constraints on composition.

The second step requires the student to construct a chronological narrative of the problem, including relevant background information and circumstances. The writer is invited to describe (and thus acknowledge) the context in which the misunderstanding occurred. The focus is to produce an

objective and accurate description of IT, the complicated situation that has occasioned the distress. Emotions expressed in the journal assignment should be included as objective facts in the narrative assignment. The aim is for the writer to come into a fuller understanding of the I-IT relationship.

The third assignment asks the student to think about what it is he or she wants from the reader or can persuade the reader to accept: the claim, of sorts. Then the student constructs the letter, deciding what details or lines of reasoning will be most persuasive to the reader, the YOU.

The fourth assignment asks the student to write a poem about the situation, to choose and submit to some kind of formal requirements that require a different kind of attention. Students are challenged to match the form they have chosen with the meaning they wish to convey. One may choose haiku, another rhyme. Some choose an image to explore. Others set up lists. What they have in common is the directive—and the permission—to play with language. Quite often this leads writers to arrive at new insights about their topics.

Finally, the last assignment calls for the student to reflect on the project and to try to locate his or her “voice” in these writings. The writer is asked, too, to assess the usefulness of the exercise in the context of the learning environment. What have they learned about their topic from viewing it in so many different ways?



Five Ways to Look at It

A series of assignments that explore a single problem from five different rhetorical stances.

Personal expression

Write a journal entry about it, knowing it will be read but giving free vent to personal and emotional response.

Narrative (Informative)

Construct a chronological narrative describing the problem, with relevant background information and circumstances.

Argument (Persuasive)

Construct an argument that is likely to gain some measure of acceptance by the other party.

Literary

Write a poem about the situation.

Reflective

Write a short essay reflecting on the project and where your voice is.

This exercise was adapted from William Coles, *The Plural I*.

How Students Respond

Through the years, I've noted common observations from students' self-assessments. Almost everyone remarks positively on the chance to indulge their feelings in the journal assignment. Narrating their emotional reactions as points of fact and speculating about the feelings of others in the second assignment helps to distance students from the immediacy of their first feelings and leads them to explore solutions that might resolve the conflict. Unsurprisingly, they often find it difficult to state succinctly what it is they want from the reader when they begin to compose the argumentative letter; some acknowledge that it is harder to argue their own position reasonably while at the same time trying to imagine the reader's response and make appropriate adaptations. More than one student has concluded that the assignment served as "an exorcism" of negative feelings that he hadn't previously confronted.

Few object to writing a poem, and I'm surprised again and again by how seriously students take this opportunity to focus on literary qualities of form as a way to think creatively about what started for most of them as an emotional rant. Some talk of how this allows them to give their feelings expression, but differently from the way they did in the journal assignment. Perceptive students have observed that focusing on form actually gives them a new flexibility, lets them express new feelings and make new connections, and makes them feel more in control. Interestingly enough, in over 25 years of using this assignment, no student has asked how to write a poem.

Where do they locate their own voice in all this? Initially they may expect it to be the journal exercise that reflects their real, authentic voice. But one hopes that they will find other voices—different, but no less authentic—in each of the five assignments and that through this exercise they will discover the value of holding different perspectives (their own and others) in tension.

The Rhetoric of Argument

This may seem a time-consuming detour to a more direct encounter with the rhetoric of argument, but I've found this experiential exercise to be an effective, economical heuristic for introducing students to rhetorical considerations and strategies that underlie the construction of any effective argument. The writer must:

- Confront and name his or her values and biases;
- Identify the values in conflict;

Narrating their emotional reactions as points of fact and speculating about the feelings of others helps to distance students from the immediacy of their feelings and leads them to explore solutions that might resolve the conflict.

- Invest time in collecting, understanding, and organizing information;
- Articulate as precisely as possible relationships among the parts;
- Try to understand the problem and possible solutions from the point of view of the other, assuming the reader to be rational and fair-minded;
- Conclude what the desirable solution might be—with whatever restrictions on the claim the evidence requires in the interests of logic and fairness; and
- Craft the evidence, examples, and underlying premises in ways that will convey one’s thinking and convictions to the reader.

Student Response:

Writing in these different forms makes a writer look not just twice but at least five times at his or her work. You don’t just write down the event that happened, but you also have to consider how it happened and why it happened. It makes you wonder: if it happened all over again, would you act the same way? This process of writing in multiple forms and methods allows writers to see different views and makes them really think twice (or five times) about a situation. Maybe the next time they get in a similar conflict, they will remember this process and act differently.

Claire Agni
Liberal Studies Major

The exercise, while but an introductory one, allows students to experience firsthand the extraordinarily complex communication challenges involved in constructing an argument; more importantly, it gives them a handful of strategies for examining and deconstructing conflict and for beginning to construct solutions. The lengthy process of writing gives students time to wrestle with the discipline of argument and inculcates habits of thinking about conflict and resolution. These skills and insights are then at least partially transportable to more highly charged situations, where the luxuries of time and detached reflection are not so evident, where strong feelings and the immediacy of heated verbal exchanges might otherwise rout respectful and useful dialogue.

DEBATE

Like rhetoric, the debate tradition focuses on functional exchanges and frames questions in specific ways that encourage productive civil discourse. Classroom debates can be effective for covering content in courses throughout the curriculum. Students are typically asked to research arguments for both sides of a question, and in doing so they may come to a greater understanding of the complexity of the underlying issues. The highly structured format and the goal of illuminating a controversy for an audience encourage strategic thinking and thorough research. Because participants do not necessarily represent their own personal views, the issue itself is emphasized. These features tend to depersonalize the exchange and make the debate space a safer place for exploring a difficult dialogue than an exchange of personal opinion might be. There is less room for distracting *ad hominem* arguments and more room for considering the substance of an argument.

Debate as a Pedagogical Tool

Steven L. Johnson

Associate Professor of Communication and Discourse Studies

Director of Debate

University of Alaska Anchorage

The ancient art of public debate offers many advantages to university professors outside the traditional communication department. Debate promotes critical thinking, develops communication skills, and provides a safe space for encountering controversial issues. The requirements of collaboration and competition provide incentives to thoroughly research evidence and arguments on both sides of the question, and the conventions of the format allow students to argue for positions that may or may not be their own, preserving the privacy of their personal views.

Of course, there are disadvantages as well. The technique requires public speaking, something many students wish to avoid for personal and cultural reasons. And certain formats, especially of competitive debate, employ a distributive model of conflict resolution in which one side is declared the victor, leaving little space for compromise.

When these shortcomings are accounted for, however, debate can be a powerful medium in which to unpack controversial issues. Successful classroom debates result from paying attention to the format, carefully phrasing the proposition, and teaching students to identify and structure their arguments around explicit issues. By offering a safe, structured venue for exploring varying perspectives and by allowing students to represent positions that they may not otherwise advocate, debate is a powerful tool for encountering and engaging in controversy.

Identifying Clash: Stasis Theory

The arguments exchanged in a debate don't have physical form, but when students work with them—that is, when they construct their own arguments, deconstruct those of their opponents, or attempt to compare positions of the two sides—they will benefit by first fixing those arguments to some set point. This point—this imagined place of clash in the imagined space of a debate—allows the debaters to identify, understand, and evaluate competing arguments most effectively.

These fixed points are known as points of stasis. Stasis, first discussed by the ancient Greek and Roman rhetoricians, refers to an imagined place where competing arguments meet. In a debate,

Debate is a form of structured conflict, with clear expectations about roles and obligations. It is built around an explicit proposition, or clearly defined point of controversy. It includes a specified mode of resolution, or clear end point for the dispute. And it is audience-centered; the focus of persuasive effort is the audience, not the opposition.

points of stasis are those places where one side's arguments clash with the other side's. For example, I might argue that Permanent Fund Dividends (PFDs) for Alaskans under the age of 18 should be placed in a trust for them to access once they reach adulthood. You argue that they should not. The point of stasis for this argument is whether to place the PFD proceeds for minors in a trust.

Two general points of stasis are relevant to debating: those that function as propositions and those that are issues.

Propositions

The proposition is the major point of contention of the topic under debate. It is phrased as a declarative statement, and it serves to focus the topic and narrow the range of potential arguments. Successful propositions generally have four features:

- **Clarity:** The proposition should be focused appropriately and should express a single concept as a declarative claim to be proved or disproved.
- **Balance:** The proposition should be phrased in a way that presents opportunities for both positive and negative arguments.
- **Challenge:** The proposition should be framed in a way that confronts the prevailing presumption.

- **Controversiality:** The issue should actually be in dispute and should engage the audience.

For example, one of the many contentious topics in Alaska involves oil exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). A simple proposition for debate might be phrased as follows:

“The U.S. federal government should open the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve to commercial oil companies for the purposes of exploration and development.”

Issues

Other more specific points of stasis—known as issues—are the meeting points of the particular arguments that must be explored to illuminate the proposition. Issues are similar to propositions in that they represent the place where the arguments of two opposing sides collide. They are different, however, in scale and focus.

In debates over the ANWR proposition stated above, the pro and con sides will likely disagree over a series of related issues. They may disagree over an economic issue, with the pro arguing that opening ANWR will lead to the creation of jobs and increased state revenues and the con denying these presumed economic benefits. They may clash over an environmental issue, with the con arguing that oil extraction may threaten a sensitive ecosystem and the pro arguing that technological advances have reduced environmental threats to negligible levels. Finally, the two sides may exchange arguments about a security issue, with the pro arguing that development of domestic oil supplies will ultimately make the United States less dependent on foreign sources of energy and, therefore, more secure. The con may counter that the horizon for ANWR oil production is so far off that present threats will have long since played themselves out by the time any ANWR oil becomes available.

Designing a Debate

Debates can be mounted in a variety of formats, so long as participants have the opportunity to engage in four distinct activities:

- **Development:** Complete arguments (claim and support) offered in support of or in opposition to an agreed-upon point of dispute (the proposition).
- **Clash:** Engagement of the opposing side’s constructive material (refutation) on issues relevant to the proposition (stases).
- **Extension:** Defense of arguments against refutation (rebuttal).
- **Perspective:** Individual arguments of both/either side related to the support of or opposition to the proposition.

If these elements are present, the interaction may accurately be termed a “debate.” The likelihood of these interactions occurring is increased if the debate attends to a few principles of effective formatting.

Components

Framing the Question

Proposition: an agreed-on point of dispute, phrased as a declarative statement.

Defining the issues

Stases: issues around which arguments can come together.

Building the Arguments

Research: Identifying the major arguments both for and against the proposition and gathering evidence to support and refute them.

Designing a Format

The format should provide equal time for students to exchange ideas and arguments while staggering those opportunities to promote exchange between the opposing sides. In general, debates feature three types of speaking times:

Formats

FOR 2 DEBATERS

One debater speaks **for** the proposition (pro side); the other speaks **against** it (con side).

Pro side: Prepared speech, 7 minutes

Con side: Cross examination of pro side, 2 minutes

Con side: Prepared speech, 7 minutes

Pro side: Cross examination of con side, 2 minutes

Pro side: Rebuttal speech, 3 minutes

Con side: Rebuttal speech, 3 minutes

Optional preparation time for each side (typically 2-3 minutes) to be used at each side's discretion.

FOR 4 DEBATERS

Two debaters speak for each side. Points of information allowed after the first minute and before the last minute of each constructive speech.

Pro side: 1st constructive speech, 7 minutes

Con side: 1st constructive speech, 7 minutes

Pro side: 2nd constructive speech, 7 minutes

Con side: 2nd constructive speech, 7 minutes

Pro side: Rebuttal speech, 4 minutes

Con side: Rebuttal speech, 4 minutes

Optional preparation time for each side (typically 2-3 minutes) to be used at each side's discretion.

Constructive speeches: At least one speaker per side will give a constructive speech that introduces their side's case, establishes the arguments for their position, and establishes the evidence for those arguments. The strongest constructive speeches satisfy both the burden of proof (to introduce positive matter on behalf of your position) and the burden of rejoinder (to engage the arguments of the opposing side). These are typically the longest speeches and may be a combination of prepared material and spontaneous argument developed during the round.

Rebuttal speeches: Rebuttals are shorter than constructive speeches and serve to focus, rather than expand, the information under consideration. They can provide perspective and place arguments in context, but they should not introduce new lines of argument.

Exchange: Each format should feature an opportunity for the debaters to interact directly. The most familiar type of exchange is cross examination, where a speaker who has just articulated his or her argument submits to questions from the opposing side. During these designated times, one side is responsible for asking questions and the other for answering. An alternative, most often found in competitive parliamentary debating, is the use of "points of information." During the constructive speeches, the opposing side may request the opportunity to make a point of information, ask a question, or make a brief observation. It is up to the speaker holding the floor to permit this exchange or not.

Typically, each speaker in a debate is permitted a constructive speech, beginning with the pro side, the team responsible for supporting the proposition. These are the longest speeches in the round, typically lasting around six to ten minutes. Between (or during) the constructive speeches, debaters have an opportunity for exchange. Points of information may be raised after the first and before the last minute of the constructive speeches; cross-examination time typically follows them. Finally, each team is accorded a rebuttal speech during which one of the team's speakers is

responsible for summarizing major arguments and comparing the teams' positions.

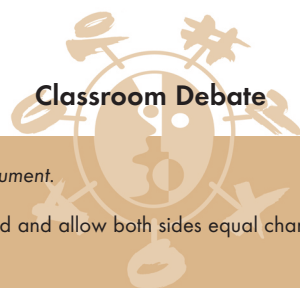
These building blocks may be assembled in a variety of ways to meet the needs of a particular class or assignment. But all formats, regardless of their specific progression, should give equal time to both teams, alternate between the opposing sides, and provide opportunities for each debater to discharge his or her responsibilities.

Responsibilities: Preparing Students to Debate

Debaters' responsibilities should be limited in explicit ways. Especially with inexperienced students, it is best to present the exercise with expository goals rather than competitive goals. Participants should be charged with using the format to unpack arguments that illuminate the controversy and provide the audience with insight into the issues. Students on opposing sides may work together to agree on the issues to be explored.

Each debater has three duties to perform: construction, deconstruction, and framing. While the time spent on these duties varies from speech to speech, debaters should keep these three priorities in mind when preparing their remarks.

- **Construction** refers to the debater's obligation to bring new substantive matter to the round, i.e. each debater should develop arguments to support his or her team's position. This responsibility is also known as developing and advancing a case. Debaters are evaluated in part on their ability to introduce and build arguments that prove their position.
- **Deconstruction** is the obligation to address the other side's constructive matter; debaters should discuss the weakness and shortcomings in their opponents' arguments. Also known as refutation, deconstruction is what most people think of when they imagine a debate. Here is where debaters test and critique the constructive arguments made by the other side.
- **Framing** refers to the duty to place the debater's constructive and deconstructive arguments into context. While framing, debaters should tell the audience about the relevance of the arguments made, how each team's position should be considered relative to others, and why, ultimately, their team's arguments prove the motion. The purpose of framing is to explain how listeners should perceive the arguments and how those arguments are relevant to the question.



A highly structured way to engage students in research and oral argument.

Choose a format: objective rules that will keep the debate balanced and allow both sides equal chance to make their case.

Construct a proposition: a declarative sentence that is genuinely controversial, clear, balanced, and challenging in some way to the status quo.

Prepare your students: with understanding of the purpose of the debate (not to win but to illuminate), the type of research you expect (substantive and utilizing multiple sources), and your grading policy (quality of research, not persuasion of audience).

Hold the debate: in class, by the rules, allowing time for class discussion afterwards.

Classroom Example: Public Policy Debate

Public policy debating is a way to link course contents to issues in the world around us. Virtually every discipline has available issues that lend themselves to this exercise.

Public policy controversies erupt over what our society should or should not do and what policies we should or should not implement. They concern what laws we'll make, what

Points of stasis (issues) in public policy debates

Economic: What are the financial consequences of this decision?

Security: How will this decision affect our safety and defense?

Social: Will this decision affect people's relationships with one another?

Cultural: How does this decision affect the culture and values of the participants?

Environmental: What are the consequences of this decision for the environment?

Political: Are the political actors and institutions capable of making this decision?

Rights: How is this decision constrained by the claims to rights of those involved?

Moral: What are the moral consequences of this decision? Is it "right?"

Legal: Does the law allow this decision to be made?

Principle: Is there a broad value or standard that influences this decision?

Feasibility: Do we have the ability to undertake the action proposed?

Significance: Is this a problem that is worth our time and attention?

Solvency: Will the proposed action solve or significantly reduce the problem?

direction our government will take, what freedoms we'll protect, what actions we'll prohibit. The ANWR proposition lends itself to a public policy debate: we'll make decisions about this question through our representative, democratic process after debating the merits and shortcomings of the proposal. On the other hand, arguments over who gets custody of Anna Nicole Smith's baby do not constitute a public policy controversy; ultimately the outcome of that decision does not dictate a course of action for the entire nation.

A public policy proposition is phrased as a proposed change to the way things are now; the debate is engaged by two sides referred to as the "pro" and "con." The pro side argues in favor of enacting the proposed policy or course of action; the con argues against it. In the ANWR example, the pro side is composed of those people and groups who argue in favor of exploration and oil extraction in ANWR; the con side includes those people and groups who argue against that development.

By convention, those who propose the policy bear the burden of proof and those who oppose the policy have presumption against change. This means that the pro side (those proposing a policy change) must prove two things: 1) that a problem exists; and 2) that the proposed policy will solve that problem. Failing in either one of those burdens means that the policy should not be adopted. The con side (those opposing the policy) need only demonstrate a single proof: either that a problem does not exist or that the proposed policy will not solve it.

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT

Public Policy Debate

Instructions to students:

As members of a functioning democracy, we are frequently called upon to voice our opinions on issues of public policy. From socialized medicine to euthanasia, policy issues demand our attention and have the potential to affect us all. These debates provide you with an opportunity to explore an issue of public policy in a format designed to expose an audience to the major arguments for and against an issue.

With your partner, you will select a public policy issue, conduct research to uncover the relevant arguments advanced by your respective sides, and present your side's position to the class in a policy debate format.

There are actually two speeches for this assignment. You will be required to present a 7-minute prepared argument (speech) with an outline and bibliography for your side of the issue. You will also ask and answer questions in a cross-examination period and give a three-minute impromptu rebuttal that addresses your partner's argument. The speeches will alternate as follows:

- 1) 7-minute prepared speech by the pro side
- 2) 2-minute cross examination of pro side by con side
- 3) 7-minute prepared speech by the con side
- 4) 2-minute cross examination of con side by pro side
- 5) 3-minute rebuttal speech by the pro side
- 6) 3-minute rebuttal speech by the con side

(optional) 1-minute preparation time per speaker prior to rebuttal

The prepared speech must represent your side of the controversy. It should be organized and substantiated with extensive research. Cross examination allows you to ask clarifying questions of your partner and to preview the arguments you'll introduce. The rebuttal speech should be an impromptu speech that addresses the arguments presented by your partner while defending your position. The preparation time is to be used prior to the rebuttal speech to organize your ideas.

Keep in mind that this is an intellectual exercise, the purpose of which is to learn about analytical and communicative strategies. It is therefore possible that you will argue a position that you do not personally espouse. Should that be the case, think of it as playing "devil's advocate." The material in this handout or in lecture may refer to winning and losing debates for the purpose of illustrating the nature of type of format, but this will not be an issue in your presentations. While the audience may be persuaded as a result of one argument or another, the goal of your cooperation with your partner is not to persuade the audience to take a particular course of action, but to illuminate the controversy surrounding the issue and the various means by which social problems may be solved.

In other words, I will not grade you or your partner more favorably because one of you has won the debate. Rather, the purpose is for you and your partner to engage in a dialogue on an issue of public importance.

Letting Students Choose their Own Topics

We discovered that students aren't always the best judges of what is controversial. In any field, there are some matters that are more or less resolved, though this may be known mainly by those who are knowledgeable in the field. Newcomers, such as the typical undergraduate student, may think things are controversial and worthy of debate largely because of their ignorance of the issues.

We asked our students to suggest controversial topics that they wanted to see debated in the classroom, then made a list of every suggested topic and let them vote for their top four. This method, while allowing a great deal of student decision-making, resulted in debates that were generally quite dull. The topics chosen by the students were in fact not very controversial, and there was very little ground for debate.

The second time around, the professor edited the list of student-suggested topics, eliminating those that were not especially controversial. The edited list was then presented to the students for class ranking. This strategy seemed to result in debates with more substance.

Sharon Chamard and Ronald Everett
Justice

Preparing for your debate

1. When you have been assigned a partner, a topic, and a side, you should begin your preliminary research on the topic. You should collect and read no fewer than 10 articles on your topic.
2. You and your partner should agree upon and write the proposition for your debate. Remember that the proposition for your debate should specify the policy being debated and should be written in a way that proposes a change to the status quo.
3. You and your partner should agree on the specific policy proposal (the "plan") about which you'll debate. This policy proposal should be outlined and submitted with your proposition for instructor approval.
4. After you and your partner have submitted your proposition, you should identify approximately five of the most significant issues for your side of the debate. These issues will become evident as you read the arguments made by those who speak for your side. In addition to identifying the issues, you should briefly outline the arguments relevant to each of those issues.
5. You and your partner should then meet again to negotiate the issues to be addressed in your debate round. Remember, your goal is to agree on the points of stasis (issues) so that you may anticipate the arguments the other side intends to make. You should attempt to agree on two to four shared issues. You and your partner may each have no more than one issue not agreed to by the other side.

6. You should develop a formal, full-sentence outline for your prepared speech. This will require more specific research than your initial effort to develop and substantiate the arguments relevant to the issues you have identified. Each main point of your prepared speech should address one of the issues. The outline should include a bibliography of all sources cited in the argument.

7. You and your partner should disclose the arguments you intend to make. Remember, the goal of this debate is expository, not competitive. You will earn a better grade if you cooperate with your partner and share information than if you compete with your partner and attempt to gain the advantage over him or her. You needn't tell him or her everything you plan to say, nor should you script your rebuttal speech (it should be impromptu!), but you should have an idea of the areas in which he or she will make arguments.

Steve Johnson
Communication and Discourse Studies

Logistics Can Be Challenging

Classroom debates have the potential to improve students' abilities to make reasoned arguments and respond to challenges. They also allow for more thorough explorations of issues than is usually possible in unstructured classroom discussions. However, be prepared to devote a major amount of your own time to planning and logistics, and understand that it may take several tries before you find a style that works for you and your discipline.

After two semesters of experimentation with this technique in the Justice curriculum, we offer the following tips:

- Hold debates near the end of the semester so all students have roughly the same amount of preparation time.
- Allow students to choose their own teams and to participate in choosing topics.
- Have students in the audience act as judges, thus increasing their participation and involvement.
- Share your grading rubric clearly, and grade at least partially for participation.

After the debate, it can be useful to continue the discussion in a more open format, with the rest of the class encouraged to participate. In our second-year criminology class, the quality of this post-debate discussion was quite high. Students talked about the merit of different arguments, noting both the strength of the evidence and the logic of the argument. This dialogue, it seemed, had moved beyond simple expressions of personal opinions to a substantive discussion of the issues and arguments presented.

Sharon Chamard and Ronald Everett
Justice

Using an example from the field of information security, this essay illustrates the power of debate to highlight multiple technological, economic, social justice, and management practice issues at the same time, and to move students beyond the original question into issues of civic responsibility and personal choice as well.

The Power to Choose

Dr. Bogdan Hoanca

*Associate Professor of Management Information Systems
University of Alaska Anchorage*

Background: The Point of Contention

A current point of contention in information security circles revolves around the idea of key escrow. Widely available encryption software can be used to conceal information even from the most powerful computers of the most powerful governments and organizations. Most of this encryption software is “open source,” meaning that the computer code is freely available for all to download, modify, and use as they see fit. Anybody with a computer and an internet connection has free access to this powerful technology.

The privacy of the encryption scheme lies not in hiding the mechanism (software) but in hiding the so-called encryption key. The key is a lengthy string of bits, difficult or impossible to guess, that allows the user to lock and unlock information using encryption software. Just like a door lock, the encryption software is the same for everybody, but the design of the key is unique, meaning each user is secure in using it. Unlike with door locks, however, anybody can download the open source encryption software, create a unique key, and then lock any information.

Elements in the U.S. government (in particular the National Security Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation) have been advocating key escrow as a mechanism for counterbalancing the destabilizing force of open source encryption software. These advocates contend that terrorist groups are able to use encryption to communicate securely over public networks. They propose laws that would require all encryption keys to be deposited with an escrow agency that allows law enforcement agencies to retrieve the escrowed keys with a court warrant. Even more demanding requirements would be to force loopholes in the actual encryption software so that the government can access the information even without encryption keys.

Classroom Exercise

Encryption is one of the more technical topics discussed in my Management Information Systems class. Although we do not delve into the mathematics of it, we talk about the power of the technology, about the wide availability of encryption software, and about the government pressure to implement key escrow. We debate whether encryption keys should be placed in escrow, and whether government and law enforcement agencies should be allowed access to the escrowed keys with a court order.

Teams of two students are asked to research both sides of the question and to prepare to defend either side. The students do not actually have to work as a team, and in the debate they will end up

on opposite sides. Working together is a way for them to exchange arguments and to develop a joint strategy if they so desire. On the day of the debate, they toss a coin to decide which side each will defend. At that time, knowing something about the other side's arguments could be useful.

As with some of the other debate topics in the class, most students start out by admitting they did not even know this was an issue and they started their research to first learn about the topic itself. Most students discover rather quickly that they have a side they lean toward, even with a brand-new topic they are just learning about.

A topic like key escrow involves research in technological issues such as how keys would be generated, how they would be stored, how they are to be sent securely to the escrow agency, and how and when they will be destroyed (if ever). Other issues are economic (who would have to pay for the costs of managing the keys), managerial (how the process would be managed), and even social (how to ensure that all social groups are treated fairly by law enforcement agencies).

Last fall, I witnessed further social justice and civic responsibility issues extending beyond the debate itself. The following dialogue ensued between two members of the audience: neither of whom were themselves participants in the debate.¹

Anne: I do not trust the government to handle key escrow fairly. I can see this as just another way for them to chip away at our rights.

Bill: That might happen, but remember that law enforcement needs a court warrant to access keys in escrow.

Anne: Law enforcement agencies already have their way with anything they want. They can search offices and private homes and target groups as they please. Judges are corrupt and working with law enforcement, and they never side with the people.

Bill: You are describing a problem with the players, not with the process. Judges are supposed to protect people and to balance the needs of law enforcement and those of private citizens. Would you agree that the problem is with the judges and not with the process?

Anne: Yes, I see your point.

Bill: Moreover, who decides who gets to be a judge? We decide. We elect judges, and we can select those who are fair and just, and not those who just do the bidding of law enforcement agencies.

Anne: We should indeed do that.

Bill: The right to vote is one of our fundamental rights. Yet many of us do not take the time nor the responsibility seriously. If you are truly concerned with your privacy and your rights, you need to vote, and you need to be an informed voter.

The timing was just perfect, because this discussion happened right before the November elections. Listening to the exchange, it struck me how powerful debate can be, leading students to research the issues, to consider and understand both sides, and to be able to defend either one. Debate can also lead the discussion into new learning areas and deliver a powerful message when you least expect it.

On the day of the debate, they toss a coin to decide which side each student will defend. At that time, knowing something about the other side's arguments could be useful.

¹ Names have been changed to protect the students' identities. Both are white and around 30 years of age.

COMBINING ELEMENTS: THE *JUSTICE TALKING* FORMAT

This essay describes a collaborative project in which three English professors created multi-perspective research assignments based on the format of National Public Radio's *Justice Talking* radio program. The classes they involved included a graduate course in composition theory and practice; a fourth-year course in public science writing; and a first-year course in composition. Each class composed a slightly different version of the project.

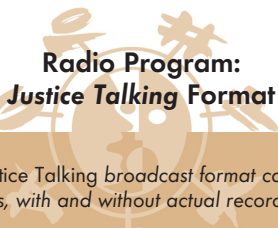
Composing Controversy: Moving from Debate to Dialogue with a *Justice Talking* Radio Program

Dr. Jacqueline Cason

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Last year, three of us who teach composition courses constructed a collaborative research assignment based on *Justice Talking*, National Public Radio's award-winning weekly show. The *Justice Talking* format creates a deliberate composition that situates controversial issues in particular times, places, and communities. We designed the project both to engage students in the discussion of controversy and to teach them the principles of rhetoric valued in our discipline.

For those unfamiliar with the format, each *Justice Talking* program explores a single issue using a mix of discrete pieces that include anecdotes, current-event reports, debate, commentary, interviews, and expert testimony. The first segment sets up the issue, usually with an interview that outlines why it is important, how it has been or is being treated in the policy arena, and perhaps some voices of those affected by it. The middle segments include a structured debate between two or more competing points of view. The last segment brings in additional voices and explores the topic



Radio Program: *Justice Talking* Format

The Justice Talking broadcast format can be adapted for use in small group collaborations and full class projects, with and without actual recording technology.

The first segment sets up the issue, usually with an interview that outlines why it is important, how it has been or is being treated in the policy arena, and perhaps some voices of those affected.

The middle segments include a structured debate between two or more competing points of view.

The last segment brings in additional voices and explores the topic from other viewpoints not covered by the debate.

from other viewpoints not covered by the debate. Together, the various pieces provide facts, relevant experiences, strengths and weaknesses, positions, and overviews of conversations in places where policy decisions are made.

Our idea was that students would use the *Justice Talking* format to compose their own broadcast on an issue we assigned them or on one of their choice. We wanted an assignment that could accomplish both disciplinary and civic goals, that could be used in a variety of writing courses, and that would also serve broader societal goals. At a disciplinary level, oppositional debate and the integration of contrasting perspectives both embody the spirit of ancient rhetoric. At a civic level, the assignment encourages students as citizens to make judgments about an issue, individually and collectively, after reproducing, understanding, and critiquing various points of view. In other words, the *Justice Talking* format offered us a process that would invite students to discover multiple perspectives and contrasting arguments on an issue, to weigh them critically, and to perform that process for their audience.

Educational Concerns: Teaching the Research and Writing Process

Students are required to write many research papers over the course of their college careers. Typically, these assignments focus on how students select and gather secondary sources and how they arrange their findings without plagiarizing. These practices are fine as far as they go, but they don't really teach students the art of synthesis and the rhetorical moves for joining an intellectual conversation. Unintentionally, typical research assignments often create the impression that conducting and writing from research is a static process rather than a dynamic engagement on a specific issue within an identifiable community.

When students perceive sources as static references to objective and authoritative knowledge, divorced from the conventions, commonplaces, languages, and histories of the community, writing a research paper becomes less an act of engagement and participation and more an act of compiling and sequencing a series of citations.

A common problem with compiling static sources of information is that student writers tend not to examine the strongest arguments from contrasting perspectives but to create straw arguments instead. They tend to ignore negative sources and to seek affirmative advocacy sources without recognizing the interests and purpose of such advocacy. Such filtering prematurely limits their perspective on the issue as a whole.

Though the project employs audio technology, writing remains a significant part of the assignment, both in preparation, written composition, and later reflection. Furthermore, these assignments support our efforts to teach the writing process rather than only the writing product. The students' projects are driven by a purpose—the need to answer questions about a topic—and not strictly by the textual concerns of thesis statements and supporting evidence. As an experience in systematic inquiry, the project models the ancient rhetorical canon of invention, a term which refers to the process of finding available arguments. In the process of finding available arguments, students must locate and examine positions held by others; in so doing, they make knowledge that allows them to participate in discussions and to extend those discussions in novel ways. Along the way, they must discover

The format creates a deliberate composition that situates controversial issues in particular times, places, and communities.

what is truly at issue: that point of stasis upon which participants agree to focus their attention for the sake of having a more productive argument. This process presents current knowledge as the product of ongoing negotiation within a community, open to continual challenge and revision from antagonistic perspectives.

Civic Concerns: Teaching the Values of Collective Wisdom and Democracy

The *Justice Talking* format requires students to present multiple sides of a contentious public issue within a historical context, an engagement that is fundamental to citizenship in a democracy. In the Sophistic spirit of *dissoi logoi*, the format promotes both civil argument and a civic education. It helps clarify differences between expert sources, advocacy sources, and experiential case studies without discounting any type of testimony or the emotions and artistry intrinsic to persuasive arguments. The format calls upon students to:

- identify central issues;
- listen to the voices of opposing views;
- restate the ideas of others;
- scrutinize their own ideas, making clear connections between their ideas and those of others;
- search beneath the issues to locate the assumptions and consequences of specific claims;
- make concessions in the interests of finding common ground; and
- treat colleagues' work as significant—to the point of defending it as their own.¹

The project requires students to present multiple sides of a contentious public issue within a historical context, an engagement that is fundamental to citizenship in a democracy.

As students consider the multitude of perspectives, opinions, and individual voices, they also learn something about the value of and the possibility for collective wisdom. This contrasts with traditional notions of the research paper that tend to privilege facts and statistics and to dismiss opinion as if it were idiosyncratic or individual. A common question students ask—"Can I put my opinion in the paper?"—reveals the individualistic and objectivist bias in students' minds. The collaborative and performative experience of the *Justice Talking* format can help to loosen the close tie between individuals and their personal opinions and to bind those opinions more publicly to a community's ideology and its characteristic ways of interpreting raw facts and data. Students can begin

to explore the links between their opinions, the characteristic terms used to express those opinions, and their membership in communities. Not only may students feel less personally threatened by controversial challenges to their opinions, but they may also be more willing to explore what counts as evidence and knowledge within different disciplinary areas and to accept multiple ways of knowing about a given issue.

Finally, the project echoes our understanding of the purposes of discussion, as articulated by Brookfield and Preskill, as a means for informed understanding, enhanced awareness, appreciation, and taking action. Experiencing discussion this way helps students understand that "[d]iscussion and democracy are inseparable."²

1 Benton, 2003; Wallen, 2003; Olbrys, 2006

2 Brookfield, Discussion as a Way of Teaching

Disciplinary Concerns: Teaching Core Knowledge in Composition and Rhetoric

In addition to teaching students about the social dimensions of research and the dramatic nature of argument, the *Justice Talking* format can introduce students to core disciplinary concepts in the field of composition and rhetoric, concepts that will assist them not only in civil discourse, but also when they invent arguments and write papers for other occasions across the curriculum. By learning core concepts in rhetoric, as bulleted below and expanded on page 73, students can become more deliberate about identifying an issue, positioning themselves in time and place, building credibility, empathizing with others, and providing logical reasons for their claims.

- **Identifying an issue.** For starters, the performative aspect of the broadcast and the need to shape many disparate pieces into a coherent whole teaches students how to identify the central issue under dispute (see stasis theory);
- **Positioning oneself in time and place.** Continuing on a holistic level, the local and current nature of the broadcast framed within a historical background demonstrates the significance of time and place in calling for a rhetorical response (see kairos);
- **Building credibility.** In an academic context in which students are usually encouraged to be objective and to avoid first-person pronouns, *Justice Talking's* relative openness to narrative and experiential knowledge combined with an emphasis on expert research and testimony teach students about the importance of a speaker's character in building trust and credibility (see ethos);
- **Empathizing with others.** In a setting where students often consider their professor the sole audience, this dramatic format invites students to become and to listen to real voices and to recognize the values and emotions these voices communicate (see pathos);
- **Providing logical arguments.** Finally, the debate segment gives students rigorous practice in developing a limited set of claims, supporting them with reasons and evidence, and rebutting the arguments, reasons, and evidence of others (see logos).

By learning core concepts in rhetoric, students can become more deliberate about identifying an issue, positioning themselves in time and place, building credibility, empathizing with others, and providing logical reasons for their claim.

Recommendations

Find ways to orient students to the format. The novelty of recording and performing were challenging to those who are more familiar with writing a paper. Therefore, we strongly recommend that students be required to listen to archived shows on their own outside of class and then to generate a set of evaluation criteria as part of a collaborative in-class activity. Student-generated criteria will be more authentic, and the exercise will increase their familiarity with the format and genre. Faculty can use those criteria for later evaluation of the student-produced show.

Build technology into early semester activities. We chose audio technology partly because it is a low-threshold technology with low equipment costs, ease of use, and access to free audio editing software. However, many students have no experience with it, which makes it important to familiarize students with the tools early. Therefore, we suggest integrating the technology into other class activities such as weekly audio letters, mini-podcasts on course topics, or peer-review activities.

Emphasize and allow time for revision. Initial practice with the technology would also empower students to make more use of editing tools. Because the Justice Talking format is a composition more than a live program, we encourage professors to allow a minimum of three to four weeks for the project and to require revision from students so that they integrate each segment into a coherent whole. Younger students with frequent access to audio technology are entering our courses as well, so we will likely encounter students already quite familiar with recording and editing.

Consider options for requirements, scope, and grouping. Composing a *Justice Talking* episode qualifies as a major course assignment, and even though we tend to lower the stakes when experimenting with a new assignment, we think that treating it as a major assignment will increase student perception of its value and produce more serious engagement. Because of its scope and the level of collaboration it requires, it will likely gain fuller engagement as a culminating semester assignment than it does as an icebreaker activity, and will likely need more time in proportion to the size of collaborative groups. Finally, though we recommend that the final composition be in audio format, we also recommend that writing remain a significant part of the assignment, both in preparation, written composition, and later reflection.

We need to recognize that some students prefer not to challenge opposing views directly or competitively.

Conclusion: Ethics of a Classroom Argument Culture

The *Justice Talking* format allows students to compose a controversy for the benefit of an audience and to perform the process of critical thinking without the pressure of needing to annihilate an opponent. Agonistic argument can be hurtful and corrosive to the human spirit and may undermine efforts to conciliate or to reach common ground on an issue.³ We need to be mindful that we foster healthy, community-minded ways of resolving conflicts and disputes, recognizing that some students prefer not to challenge opposing views directly or competitively. The *Justice Talking* format is therefore not intended to be a showcase for individual voices or competitive debate but rather a densely textured exchange of ideas. For students inexperienced in this kind of intellectual exchange, the archive provides an opportunity to spectate first and generate their own criteria or goals to strive for in their own practice.

Finally, the notion that there are always two equally valid sides to every argument is steeped in a worthy ethic of intellectual fairness and balance. However, we argue that the notion of “fair and balanced” alone may lead to divisiveness and political enclaves. We think it worthwhile to encourage students to weigh the sides more critically and to weigh the relative merits of different perspectives. Unlike the language of intellectual freedom expressed in David Horowitz’s Academic Bill of Rights (ABOR), a rhetoric of *dissoi logoi* asks students to discover their positions through apprenticeship rather than indoctrination. In the ABOR view, the idea of balance implies that for every liberal left

³ Tannen, 1998; Tompkins, 2003

view there must be a conservative right view. A *dissoi logoi* rhetoric, however, is concerned with engagement rather than opposition; it allows us to teach students to maintain an intellectual equilibrium through a deep understanding of their own footing. The aim of practice is not simply the awareness of other ideas—often shorthand in consumer society for paying attention only to opinions one wishes to hear—but rather the ability to reproduce them, to understand them, and to critique them all. Such pedagogy, as communications professor Stephen Olbrys explains, potentially turns the classroom into “a site for lively disputation over public virtues and the impetus for fostering relationships predicated on respect and understanding.”⁴

In closing, we anticipate and wish to answer the charge of relativism. Our discipline is inclined to embrace a pedagogy that emphasizes a diversity and pluralism of ideas and beliefs. While it is true that a thorough education in the conventions, commonplaces, languages, and histories of the community was fundamental to ancient rhetorical training, it would be overly simplistic to conclude that we encourage our students to find all perspectives to be equally valid. Our faith in rhetorical strategies grows out of the process of searching for, articulating, and challenging plural truths in order to determine an ethical course of action. As Kenneth Burke acknowledges in *On Symbols and Society* (1989), it is easy to confuse the dialectic with the relativistic, because “any term can be seen from the point of view of another term.” When we look at the process as a whole from the standpoint of participation, we witness a “perspective of perspectives” or a “resultant certainty” that emerges from a contributing series of provisional certainties.⁵ And it is from that summative standpoint, modified by multiple terms and incongruous perspectives that we invite our students to discover the confidence to act in the world with conviction.

Our faith in rhetorical strategies grows out of the process of searching for, articulating, and challenging plural truths in order to determine an ethical course of action.



For more on academia’s perceived liberal bias, see Politics, pages 170-193. For more on Horowitz and the ABOR, see Speaking the Language, pages 206-207.

Stephen Olbrys defines *dissoi logoi* as an ancient pedagogy that insists upon active and performed engagement with multiple perspectives rather than mere awareness of, limited exposure to, and eventual isolation from oppositional perspectives. He recommends this approach in response to recent accusations of liberal bias in academia and as a good faith effort to respond to David Horowitz’s Academic Bill of Rights (ABOR).

4 Olbrys, p. 367.

5 Burke, p. 256.

CASE STUDY: PUBLIC SCIENCE WRITING

Science Today

We began the semester with the historical “two cultures” debate over whether colleges should privilege a scientific education over a humanities education. I used this assignment as an ice-breaker: one large collaborative activity that would 1) introduce conflicts between scientific ways of knowing and the policy issues they inform; and 2) address the role of public deliberation in resolving controversies that require scientific understanding. We called our show *Science Today* instead of *Justice Talking*. The collaborative episode was prepared in parts outside of class and performed in a single class period.

The episode began with an interactive timeline of key events in the history of the two cultures debate, followed by a graphic display of the history of science in a series of images set to music. The segment emphasized the driving curiosity in poets and chemists alike, along with issues of social stratification, differing employment opportunities in the sciences and humanities, increasing levels of international competition in global economies, and the aims of education in helping individuals and communities address economic and moral challenges.

The overview and historical background segment was followed by a current event news report of the recent groundbreaking for UAA’s new science facility. The segment featured an interview with James Liszka, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, a philosophy professor dressed in a long white lab coat. The student newscasters described the dedication in ritualistic terms as an expression of values, joined with a performance of indigenous music and the Alaska Flag song.

The debate portion underscored the common values shared by both the sciences and the humanities. The person advocating for scientific education described science as systematized knowledge or a system for organizing complexities, and claimed that it would carry the humanities into the future with momentum and shared values. She spoke metaphorically, calling upon the class to witness how the ink of her math homework had bled through the page and intermingled with her history notes. The spokesperson advocating for a humanities education also spoke metaphorically of foundational knowledge with an emphasis on civic engagement. In short, the debate centered on questions of emphasis and priority, with the “science” student emphasizing knowledge and the “humanities” student emphasizing civic engagement.

Following the debate, the moderator focused class attention with four key questions:

- Should all students have to take courses in the humanities and fine arts, even if they plan to pursue a science-based career?
- Which is more important: how much one knows or how well one can express it publicly? Why?
- How important it is for a person with a very high level of technical expertise to be able to communicate specialized knowledge to the general public? This question was addressed to the science advocate.
- How important it is for a person who is a competent and eloquent communicator to be able to maintain a high level of scientific knowledge and literacy? This question he posed to the humanities advocate.

The episode concluded with two commentators who delivered personal essays. The first spoke from the perspective of a Bristol Bay salmon fisherman who works under a system of quotas set by fisheries biologists whose job it is to manage the harvest of a renewable resource. He spoke about the limitations and unpredictable nature of an imperfect science and the biologists' responsibility to communicate with fishermen in both technical and lay terms. He supported an educational system that prepares students with marketable skills but also helps them experience an affinity to society instead of existing in separate communities that cannot communicate or understand one another.

The second commentator spoke from the perspective of a Chinese exchange student who has witnessed this debate in her home country. She described the high-stakes single standardized college entrance examination as "cruel" and the time it occurs as "Black June" or "Black July." She told the story of one award-winning eighteen-year-old who wrote a book on the topic, a book that claimed high school science courses were meaningless in preparing students for the exam and thereby functioned to make higher education off limits to very talented students in the arts. The commentator advocated a more flexible system that would play to the strengths of diverse students without limiting their future educational opportunities.

Jacqueline Cason
English

CASE STUDY: THEORY AND PRACTICE IN COMPOSITION AND RHETORIC **Grammatical Correctness: Die Hard Standards v. Bleeding Heart Revisionists**

I introduced this assignment to a group of graduate students who were scheduled to be teaching assistants the next semester and instructors of record the semester after that. The intent of using Justice Talking in this class was twofold. First, it was an assignment that they could turn around and use in their own classrooms the following semester. Second, they would get to fully investigate and debate a difficult issue of their own. One concern about graduate students is that they tend to be very similar and seem to form a homogenous group. However, with this exercise it became apparent that homogeneity was only a surface characteristic, at least for this particular group.

It was initially challenging for the students to decide on a topic. They explored several possibilities, from the opening of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to the treatment of detainees at Guantanamo Bay. I tried to steer them toward an issue that arose out of their course material, which at first seemed like it might be too esoteric. Reassuringly, however, controversy seems to be a naturally occurring quality of engaged groups.

From the very beginning, these students had found themselves in disagreement about how much they should weigh correctness and idiomatic usage when evaluating student writing. In the Writing Center, where each of them works, they were being introduced to our deeply held disciplinary belief that correctness is overemphasized and that teaching "grammar" (as they incorrectly term it) is only tangential to good writing. Yet many of them, having been taught these fundamentals all their lives, could not agree. The discussion culminated in a full-fledged debate after an expert in Teaching English as a Second Language proposed that ESL students

be evaluated on a different scale from native speakers. A native speaker can reasonably be expected to use prepositions in idiomatic ways, but it is nearly impossible for people who do not have prepositions in their native language to use English prepositions correctly. Except through deep acculturation and practice—and sometimes not even then—ESL students cannot learn “rules” for the use of prepositions, if such rules can even be articulated. It seems nonsensical to evaluate a person on failing to learn what is impossible to learn.

This debate irritates our assumptions about learning and asks us to examine some of our most deeply held beliefs about fairness, both of which tend to be largely unexamined by new writing teachers. It proved to be an ideal topic that was genuinely contested within the group, with members tending to fall either into the “diehard standards” group or the “bleeding heart revisionists” group. The beauty of the *Justice Talking* format, however, is that both groups—indeed, everyone in the class—had to work together to assemble the hour-long performance.

This was not a “gather your sources and then debate” sort of exercise. Rather, it was a composing exercise, in which students had to step back and observe their contributions from the perspective of a listener. Their goal was to construct a program that fairly and thoroughly discussed the issues, that allowed important voices to speak and that made room for listeners to contemplate the issues.

The class composed and designed several program segments:

- Introduction, in which the importance of the issue was explained;
- Historical background, in which the audience was acquainted with the history of the debate;
- Interviews, in which experts representing multiple perspectives were allowed to speak;
- Interviews with laypersons, in which a group of non-experts offered opinions;
- And finally a debate, in which two perspectives were argued in calm, respectful tones, supported by evidence.

The students quickly discovered that it was nearly impossible to find a “diehard standards” expert; most composition experts reject the standards approach. Laypersons, however, overwhelmingly advocated for it, especially ESL students themselves. The process of producing a “show” together, as opposed to participating only in a debate, caused both sides to engage with their opponent in unfamiliar ways. How do I make your argument sound good? Students on one side provided information to students on the other side for the good of the final product.

Although few participants changed their minds about the question, many found problems with their earlier perspectives and came to terms with the notion of a spectrum upon which this debate exists. We all learned how challenging it can be to hold an extreme view in the presence of a sympathetic opponent. For us as teachers, the experience also demonstrated how much orchestration is required to have a meaningful difficult dialogue.

Kerri Morris
English

The *Justice Talking* Assignment in Disciplinary Terms

Kairos. By identifying the issue's background, history, and current significance, and by including voices of those affected by it, the introductory segments reveal kairos, which can be defined as the right, proper, or opportune time and place to do something. The *Justice Talking* format requires students to invent and establish a strong sense of kairos within their overview and current event segments as well as within their own arguments.

Stasis Theory. The debate segment strives to bring the controversy into *stasis*, focused on an agreed-upon point of contention. Stasis theory offers a questioning process that helps students identify what is at issue, where stakeholders stand, and how they might stand together in their disagreement. For example, if a pro-choice advocate is arguing about the value of a woman's right to self-determination and a pro-life advocate is arguing about the definition of human life, the two parties are not in stasis. They do not even agree what the issue is, and therefore cannot have a productive argument on it. Systematic questions of conjecture, definition, quality, and action can facilitate stasis. Debate participants can be expected to discover and disclose their arguments ahead of time in an effort to begin the debate with stasis.

Ethos. The format presents a number of voices in character and does not immediately filter those characters through a single writer's voice and perspective, thus allowing audience members to sense where each character's interests lie. The term *ethos* refers to character and credibility, both of which are fundamental to the art and science of persuasive argument. Throughout the assignment, students are expected to invent their own *ethos* rather than pretend to be objective non-characters. They are also expected to locate disinterested experts with an established or situated *ethos* on the issue. An audience is more inclined to trust a character who is well-informed, demonstrates good will toward others, and refrains from fallacious arguments. A conscious focus on *ethos* also encourages students to weigh the quality of various sources and to recognize that some sources are more credible than others.

Pathos. *Justice Talking* episodes frequently include interviews with people who have experienced directly the consequences of an issue or policy, and students are expected to do the same. The term *pathos* refers to the emotions and values of the audience and to efforts to evoke those emotions and acknowledge those values. The voices of real people in real places can evoke much greater emotion than research sources cited in parentheses only. Emotion and commitment are closely aligned with our sense of character and motivation. Appeals to *pathos* are based on the assumption that emotions are communal and that human beings share similar kinds of emotional experience. Because emotions are sometimes perceived as irrational, it is valuable for students to understand the role they play in the reasoning process and in moving people to action. Emotion also increases engagement. Adopting only an objective distance may blind students to the role that proximity and interest play in the deliberative process. An appreciation for *pathos* encourages students to observe and reflect on the relative proximity and interest of their own positions and those of their sources.

Logos. The debate segment emphasizes logical argument. Participants are expected to affirm and refute and to offer clear reasons and compelling evidence for their claims and counter claims. Advocates have the opportunity to question each other, and the moderator may ask questions to tease out ideological commonplaces that inform the debaters' positions. The term we most commonly associate with argument is *logos*; it refers to the orderly presentation of claims, reasons, and evidence, as well as counter claims, reasons, and evidence. Though argument need not be equated exclusively with *logos*, it would obviously suffer without it.

DIFFICULT DIALOGUE MAJORITIES AND MINORITIES

We deliberately designed our faculty intensive curriculum to focus early in the week on teaching approaches and traditions that originated in the dominant western culture. Our goal was to start with what we knew to be familiar territory to the majority of our participants, and then gradually introduce some less familiar (and perhaps less comfortable) strategies later in the week. Combined with our focus on disruptive students on Day One, however, the focus on western traditions during Day Two helped bring to the surface some of the differences between our two universities and our various cultural perspectives.

That UAA participants and project leaders would be in the majority was never really in doubt. UAA greatly outnumbers APU—in students, in faculty, and in resources. Of the thirty faculty members selected for inclusion that first year, twenty-five were from UAA and five were from APU, a rough approximation of our relative sizes. UAA had a faculty development center that could organize and facilitate the intensives and a partnership office that could provide staff support and backup. It was a partnership, to be sure. But one partner was a lot bigger than the other.

As in all majority/minority populations, there are cultural differences, and they matter.

- UAA is a large public university with a dual mission of access and excellence. Open access translates into a greater range of students and of student behaviors, including, inevitably, many more problematic behaviors.
- APU is a small private university with selective admissions and a focus on active learning, which translates into a somewhat more elite atmosphere and a significantly more individualized approach to instruction.
- UAA operates under a tenure system; by and large, its faculty accept (or are at least resigned to) traditional methods of teaching and evaluation.
- APU does not practice tenure; its faculty receive multi-year, rolling contracts connected to periodic reviews that assess, among other criteria, evidence of commitment to experiential and active learning.

In addition, our planning committees and faculty cohorts included large majorities of white people, many of whom had a significant investment in traditional modes of academic discourse, and a tendency to see the traditional values and methods of the academy as the standard to which all should aspire. From this perspective, a major goal is to help students assimilate to the culture and requirements of higher education and rise to the standards of the university. While concurring with these standards and also wishing to help students negotiate the culture, a smaller number, including some faculty members of color, wanted to emphasize a few other things as well, such as preserving the dignity and value of non-traditional cultures in the face of the dominant cultural juggernaut and opening the university to the perspectives and concerns of its minority populations.

By the end of the second day, these cultural differences were beginning to be felt. Many of the APU faculty members had become disappointed and alarmed by the first day's activities. Some of them, and others, were equally alarmed by the second day's activities. Rhetoric? Debate? Didn't we have anything more progressive to share with them than that?

At this point, our very project name became a point of debate. In the original grant proposal, we had called our project *Encountering Controversy*. The grant writers had selected the title under deadline pressure and without giving it a great deal of thought. Now several participants pointed to the verb and voiced their opinion that it was too passive, too reactive, too expected, too safe. They signaled their active stance and intentionality by renaming it *Engaging Controversy* instead. It was just a word change, but it was a good one.

Cultural differences would continue to play a role on Days Three and Four.

For many years now, I've wanted to live less reactively and more proactively, and I've felt that a well-balanced way of working in the world is one that keeps these two dynamics in tension. Some of my effort is directed toward holding the line against what I see as harmful or wrong, but some is also devoted toward celebrating the good and creating what I consider healing or constructive responses for our world and its many human and more-than-human communities.

It might seem like mere semantics to change the word from 'encounter' to 'engage,' but in effect we were signaling our intention not just to react to instances of controversy in our classrooms and academic lives but to go out of our way to use difficult dialogues as an opportunity for mutual learning.

Mei Mei Evans
English

START TALKING

Questions for Discussion:

How does your discipline establish the credibility of sources of knowledge?

What questions in your field are particularly in need of discussion or rhetorical intervention at this point in time?

What place do shared human values and emotions have in the way your discipline makes arguments?

Which perspectives does your discipline embrace almost without questioning? Which ones does it ignore or reject?

How do you get students to step outside of those perspectives and discover other arguments and points of view?

Race, Class, Culture

Who we are and how we see the world are substantially shaped by perceptions of our racial, class, and ethnic identities...

One of the cardinal rules for discussion across class and ethnic boundaries is to begin by acknowledging the fact of diversity. Honoring differences is a way of recognizing that racial, class, and ethnic identifications have greatly enriched many people's lives.

Brookfield and Preskill

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FACULTY INTENSIVE

Day Three

The third day is always pivotal. It's halfway through the week, so there's some kind of natural turning point in the group energy. We talk about weighty topics such as racism, sexism, classism, identity, culture, and privilege; these topics tend to stir people up. And we bring in strategies that ask participants to reveal their identities in ways that are very different from how academics typically represent themselves to each other and to students. These techniques can be genuinely controversial within the group.

We started from two basic premises: 1) that most difficult dialogues are related to questions of identity; and 2) that many of us in the dominant culture may know little about our heritage, may consider its role in shaping identity to be minimal, and may be unaware of the range and ubiquity of white privilege. We wanted to demonstrate how hard it is to recognize and transcend what seems to be a natural world order when, indeed, it is not. We also wanted to raise awareness of the Alaska Native cultures in our midst. Both our universities sit on traditional Native lands, and both have special missions to serve our Native populations. We wanted to ask ourselves: How are we doing? Are Native voices being heard? Are Native ways of knowing and learning being given equal status?

Several of Wednesday's activities were designed by Alaska Native Studies Professor Nancy Furlow and Anthropology Professor Phyllis Fast, both of whom are Alaska Native women. We invited them to bring in strategies from their own heritages that were not part of our text or common academic experience. But both of them felt that the demands of translation would be too intense, that the gap between what works in Native communities and what you could do in a higher education classroom is too big to make sense.

They focused instead on strategies for creating democratic and inclusive classrooms, choosing techniques such as the Circle of Objects and the Five Minute Rule that are consciously inclusive and that can be used to build trust, cultivate respect, and create community. The idea of including all voices is an essential element in many Alaska Native ways of communicating. Most Native cultures have something like these practices, where people take turns, speak from the heart, and relate to each other on a personal level.

Sample Agenda

- Exercise: Identity Groups
- Exercise: Circle of Objects
- Reflection and Discussion
- Presentation and Discussion:
White Privilege
- Exercise: Hatful of Quotes
- Exercise: The Five-Minute Rule

SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE

Human communication is often messy, and nowhere more so than in the language we use to talk about racial and ethnic groups. Words do more than simply label things; they are often imbued with history and power as well. Over time, in response to different historical, social, or cultural circumstances, groups of people change the way they refer to themselves and the ways they wish to be referred to by others. These changes reflect new understandings and re-defined relationships of equity and power. Groups may claim for themselves terms that were previously used in a derogatory manner, turning them into proud positives instead. Some may prefer terms, words, or phrases from their original languages (for example, Inupiat) over words from a foreign source (such as Eskimo). Some may wish to be identified with a highly specific cultural or ethnic group (such as Hmong) while others prefer a more general moniker (Asian). Sometimes the terms evolve rapidly, with the preferred term (Negro, colored, Black, African American, people of African descent) changing several times in several decades.

Sometimes people avoid the difficult conversations about race because they don't know which words to use. Many people are afraid of using the wrong word and either hurting others or being publicly embarrassed by their word choice. They realize that even the best intentions may not prevent the appearance of their being insensitive rather than conscientious, and they fear that they will have no credibility in a discussion. And so they disqualify themselves, and remain silent.

We must be willing to acknowledge and correct our mistakes, and to examine any ignorance, assumptions, or over-generalizations that may lurk behind them.

We believe respectful dialogue to be the foundation of democracy. Since language and culture are always dynamic, it is inevitable that somewhere in the process we will all make mistakes. We must not let that keep us from talking, however. We must be willing to acknowledge and correct our mistakes, and to

examine any ignorance, assumptions, or overgeneralizations that may lurk behind them. This is a critical first step toward engaging in meaningful dialogues, which is a critical step toward preserving and reinvigorating democracy. It may be comforting to realize you are not the first person to make the mistake, and you won't be the last. The important thing is to keep talking and not let the fear of making mistakes keep us from re-engaging. That would be the most profound mistake of all.

With that said, here at this particular historic moment, from this region of the world, we put forth some provisional definitions of terms we tried to use consistently throughout this handbook. We think of these as terms of convenience, and we acknowledge their limitations. Most of us routinely enclose these words in quotation marks when we use them, to signal our understanding of the worlds of difference the shorthand obscures. We apologize in advance if our choices don't match the terms you prefer. We're following our own advice here, and pushing through our fear of making mistakes so that we can start talking about race, class, and culture, and how these affect our classrooms and our teaching.

Terms of Convenience

Alaska Native: We tried to avoid this term as a noun and use it only as an adjective: Alaska Native people, Alaska Native professors, Alaska Native students. The designation is a generic term for the many distinct cultural and ethnic groups or nations that are indigenous to Alaska, including Inupiat, Yup'ik, Athabaskan, Aleut, Tlingit, Haida, and dozens of others.

Minority: Although we recognize that this term implies a kind of marginalization that we did not wish to perpetuate, we used it anyway to refer to cultural or ethnic groups that are (at least for the time being) outnumbered in our two universities and the U.S. at large.

White: Despite widespread discomfort with it, we used this designator to refer generically to light-skinned European Americans and even more generically to the mainstream values and institutions of the dominant American culture.

IDENTITY

Introducing ourselves

In many cultures of the West—including the mainstream of American academia—we introduce ourselves with a name and some indication of what we do. I'm Kay, your editor. You're you (state your name and faculty rank). We send our resumés and vitae on ahead, and we trail our publications and portfolios and faculty files along behind. We use our individual activities and accomplishments as a basis for many of our professional and social relationships. We think this is normal.

But if middle class white people and others raised in mainstream Western cultures tend to define themselves by their individual activities and accomplishments, many other groups do not. Students and faculty of color may define themselves in terms of their cultural or historical roots, values, or affiliations. Those from minority religions or working-class backgrounds or those with disabilities or gay/lesbian orientations may identify themselves by some of these features. Many are struggling to keep their sense of identity while attending or working in the university, and they may be unable to fully participate unless their identity is acknowledged and respected.

The entire question of names, naming, and the language used by groups to refer to themselves and each other is therefore of great importance in our learning environments. It matters how we introduce ourselves, whom we identify with, what we call ourselves and each other. To tackle controversial (or indeed any) issues with civility, we must first learn to listen to each other, address each other with respect, and honor each other's right to be seen as individuals.

Identity Groups

Our facilitator, Libby Roderick, adapted this exercise from a model developed by the National Coalition Building Institute many years ago. We found it an effective way to get everyone thinking together about personal and group identities.

Before the exercise, prepare a list of potential identity groups that may or may not be represented by your participants. Try to be as complete as possible, including major religious and ethnic groups, class affiliations, gender, ability/disability, parental status, age, and—if the setting is safe enough—sexual orientation. Start with a few identities that are relatively innocuous (artists, students), and build up to those that are more highly charged.

Tell people what's going to happen, and then, one by one, start calling out the identity groups from your list. As you call out each group, invite those who identify with that group or consider themselves members of that group to stand if they choose. Pause a moment, asking all participants just to notice who is in this group and who is not. Thank them, and then call out the next group, repeating the process, noticing who's there and who's not there, and moving on.

After the list is complete, ask all participants to pick at least one of the groups they identified with, pair off, and talk with a partner about the following questions:

- What's great about being a member of this identity group?
- What's tough about it?
- What do you wish people knew about this group?
- What do you want people to never do, say, or think again about your group?

After several minutes, bring the whole group back together and call out the identity groups again. This time, invite group members to briefly share their responses to the questions. Make sure everyone knows that those sharing are speaking from their own experience as individuals; their answers do not represent the entire group and may conflict with one another. Invite them to clarify how they would like to be identified if their preferred terms do not match those used in the exercise. For example, if you called out a group such as “all or part Native American,” you may also ask if there are those who wish to be identified as Iroquois, Haida, or Hopi. Close with an opportunity for people to briefly reflect on what they got out of the exercise.



Identity Groups

A simple exercise to get everyone thinking together about their cultural, class, ethnic, religious, gender, and other identities.

Before class: prepare a list of potential identity groups. Include large, broad groups as well as small, distinctive groups.

Call out the groups. Invite members to stand, and invite everyone to notice who is in the group and who is not.

Think about the groups. Have participants pair off and discuss what's great and what's hard about being in their particular groups, and what they want others never to do, say, or think about their group again.

Open discussion. Bring the group back together, and invite people to share.

This exercise was adapted from a model called Up/Downs developed by the National Coalition Building Institute.

Our experience

We found this exercise to be especially useful for pointing out groups that weren't represented in our faculty intensive. When Libby called out Jews and Muslims (at separate times), not a single person stood up. She asked participants to notice the absence of these key groups, and talked a bit about their small numbers and general invisibility on Alaska campuses. When she invited gay, lesbian, or bisexual faculty to stand, and again no one responded, she suggested that the lack of people standing did not necessarily mean that members of these groups were not present. These groups still suffer from legalized discrimination, and individuals might, therefore, not wish to publicly identify themselves as members.

The meta-discussions were quite lively. One participant objected to the idea that personal disclosure results in a reduction of biases and stereotypes on the part of the listening audience, a major goal of the exercise (see her essay on page 100). Others argued against the need to identify ourselves by labels at all. A few expressed concern with the personal nature of this and similar exercises, saying, "I am not comfortable with 'touchy/feely' exercises, especially when I am the instructor. I am afraid I will not be able to deal with the emotions that come up..." Some wanted to extend the identity groups to include interests (such as musical tastes, hobbies, etc.) rather than identities. The most widespread concern involved students having to ally themselves with an outwardly imposed category (such as Asian-American) when they would not have picked that name for themselves (identifying, instead, as Samoan-American or "from Malaysia"). Libby suggested inviting all participants to clarify their identities within the groups.

On the good side, most participants indicated that the experience gave them greater insight into the wide range of identities and backgrounds operating in a given group:

- *"I had no idea that people identified as working class here!"*
- *"I was surprised by how many self-identified atheists are in the group."*
- *"Some of the people here I know quite well (or so I thought), but I learned something new about them."*

Most indicated that, in the future, they would be more aware of the multiplicity of learners in their classrooms. Several also said they felt more part of a learning community after completing the exercise with their colleagues.

PRIVILEGE

Most white people don't consciously intend to behave in ways that can be experienced by their students or colleagues of color as racist; they simply go along with a system that is already biased in their favor, never noticing the privileges built into their daily lives and institutional structures. This essay introduces the concept of white privilege, using the seminal work of feminist scholar Peggy McIntosh as a basis for exercises designed to help white faculty members quickly grasp the existence and mechanics of institutionalized racism, and their unaware participation within that system.

White Privilege

Libby Roderick

*Associate Director, Center for Advancing Faculty Excellence
University of Alaska Anchorage*

...it has frequently been the case that White students enrolled in my class on racial and cultural issues in counseling expect to be taught all about the cultures of people of color, and they are almost always surprised to hear that we will be discussing the White group's experience. Some students remark that they are not White; they are female, or working-class, or Catholic, or Jewish, but not White. When challenged, they reluctantly admit that they are White, but report that this is the first time they have had to think about what it means for them.

Rita Hardiman

Nobody really likes to talk about racism, oppression, and privilege. These are scary topics that bring up strong feelings of fear, defensiveness, guilt, anger, and grief. Most of us are unprepared to handle strong emotion, in the classroom or outside, and would prefer to avoid these topics if possible. Because of this discomfort, reluctance, and fear—and as many of the *Difficult Dialogues* projects nationwide have recognized—racism and white privilege are among the most pervasive, charged, and under-addressed difficult dialogues on campuses, in the country, and in the world.

Many of us who are white know that our group exercises unfair power and privilege over other groups. We read about it. We hear about it. In short, we know in theory that we are privileged. However, we don't bump up against the effects of white privilege as experienced by people of color, so the reality of discrimination is lacking; for us, it's largely an abstraction, an idea. We feel that our efforts to be fair, caring, just people make things a little better for those who are not privileged, but in fact, they do little to change their everyday experiences of institutionalized racism.

I wanted to at least make people aware of these unacknowledged privileges so that in the classroom we can make a more informed effort to ensure that we are not excluding or silencing others. I approached the topic and exercise with caution and care, deciding to place it smack in the middle of the intensive, when participants had already built some sense of safety and shared community with each other and after they'd had a chance to consider the rich tradition of Western approaches to controversy, including rhetoric and debate.

Background

It has been twenty years since Peggy McIntosh published her working paper called *White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies*. This article, along with a shorter version called *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*, introduced the concept of privilege into academic discussions of equity, discussions that had previously focused exclusively on the deficits experienced by marginalized groups. Nearly two decades later, these two pieces remain among the most easily accessible learning tools to help European Americans quickly begin to grasp the realities of institutional racism and white privilege and their own roles within those systems.

The paper contains a list of forty-six ways in which McIntosh, a white professor, benefits from unearned white privilege, enjoying daily, institutional advantages denied her colleagues of color. McIntosh draws parallels between her experience of white privilege and the ways her male colleagues benefit from institutional sexism, and discusses the ways in which white people are systematically trained to ignore the system of privilege from which they benefit. She writes:

As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see the corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage...Many, perhaps most, of our white students in the United States think that racism does not affect them because they are not people of color: they do not see "whiteness" as racial identity...In my class and place, I did not recognize myself as a racist because I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth.

Exercise

I used the McIntosh article as the basis for an exercise in our faculty intensive. I made a list of twenty-three of the privileges McIntosh could take for granted that her colleagues of color could not. Participants sat in a circle and took turns reading the statements aloud. After each statement was read, we paused to allow reflection by the group. The list was then passed to the next participant to read the next statement.

Examples include:

- I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
- I can avoid spending time with people whom I was trained to mistrust and who have learned to mistrust my kind or me.
- If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
- I can be reasonably sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
- I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
- I did not have to educate our children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection.

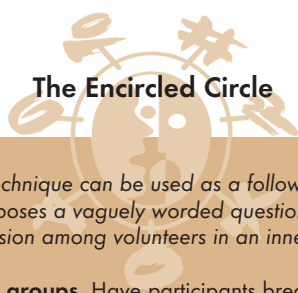
I paired the list-reading exercise with an exercise called The Encircled Circle, adapted from Brookfield and Preskill. In the textbook exercise, a small circle of chairs faces inwards, surrounded by a larger circle of chairs. Volunteers fill the inner circle and begin their discussion with the question "What's at stake here?" The rest of the participants occupy the outer circle and serve as witnesses to the focused discussion of the inner circle. At the suggestion of one of our participants, however, we added an empty chair to serve as a revolving door to the inner circle; anyone who

wished could occupy it briefly, add a short comment, and return to the outer circle. This modification encouraged participation in the inner circle and created fluidity between the two groups.

The discussions were animated. Some people spoke openly of the pain of experiencing institutional and other forms of racism and of watching their children or loved ones suffer from its impacts. Others expressed surprise and dismay at the ways in which they had themselves colluded with racism without thinking about it. A white woman was horrified at the drain on energy, talent, health, and potential that results from racism. An Alaska Native professor observed that the list was missing the most significant challenge he experienced in dealing with racism on a daily basis: handling frequent physical threats and violence. He told stories of Alaska Natives on the receiving end of rough treatment by store security guards, random attacks by complete strangers, and name-calling (often being mistaken for individuals from other ethnic backgrounds, such as people of Arab or Asian descent).

This exercise allowed participants to reflect both emotionally and intellectually on the effects of white privilege and racism on our mutual lives and to begin to consider how such effects might also impact our teaching styles and our students. Stories such as these opened the eyes of others to realities of racism of which they were previously unaware.

There are painfully few opportunities in academia for faculty to wrestle with these critical issues on more than superficial or purely intellectual levels. However, in my experience, even a small bit of awareness on the part of majority professors about the kinds of pressures and systemic barriers facing many of their minority students can make them into far more trustworthy mentors and teachers, which translates into far greater academic, personal, and professional success for the students. Although it seemed to some participants that we were spending too much time on issues irrelevant to their disciplines, I am convinced it was time well spent. If we could change our practices enough so that students no longer experience us as reproducing, reinforcing, or representing an often oppressive society in the classroom, the effort would pay off hugely and in immeasurable ways. One of those ways would be fewer, but more productive, difficult dialogues.



The Encircled Circle

This technique can be used as a follow-up to discussions of culture, heritage, and diversity. It deliberately poses a vaguely worded question and allows observers in an outer circle to witness a focused discussion among volunteers in an inner circle.

Small groups. Have participants break into small groups of three or four and discuss the question "What is at stake?" Ask them to speak from personal experience and values.

Inner circle: Coming back together, invite one or two people from each group to form a small circle, with the remaining participants arrayed behind them. Each member of the inner circle is invited to sum up the issues and themes they discussed in their small group.

Everyone: Returning to the full circle configuration, everyone is invited to deal with the question "is there something more?"

This exercise was adapted from Brookfield and Preskill, who adapted it from the Fetzer Institute.

CULTURE

Books of the Year

We chose culture and identity as inaugural themes for our Books of the Year program. After lengthy committee review and several heated discussions, we selected two books for 2006-07: Anne Fadiman's *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* for the fall and T.C. Boyle's *The Tortilla Curtain* for the spring. Each details a certain kind of cultural collision, complete with misunderstandings and misperceptions that lead to tragedy.

Many of us found these books useful as springboards to discussion. We held faculty roundtables to share our ideas with each other. Some of us led open discussions in the bookstore, residence halls, and student lounges. Several classes held modified debates in which students argued for a position or issue from the perspective of one of the book's characters or groups. One class held a role-playing exercise in which students acted out the parts of the Lee family and their doctors, nurses, and social workers, trying to imagine an alternate and happier ending to that real-life tragedy.

We were hoping to create a kind of shared experience, linking faculty and students all across our universities in a communal culture, all engaged in dialogue about the same topics. With these first two books, we were off to a good start.

FALL SEMESTER

The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down — Anne Fadiman

This powerful non-fiction book tells the story of Lia Lee, the infant daughter of Hmong immigrants, born with a severe seizure disorder known in the West as epilepsy and to Lia's parents as *qaug dab peg* ("the spirit catches you and you fall down"). From the moment Lia arrives in a California emergency room, cultural differences and linguistic miscommunication begin to drive a rift between her loving parents and well-intentioned doctors. The tragedy that unfolds opens the door to conversations about cultural difference, the modern immigrant experience, and the limits of Western medicine.

SPRING SEMESTER

The Tortilla Curtain — T.C. Boyle

When wealthy nature writer Delaney Mossbacher hits illegal immigrant Cándido Rincon with his car on a Los Angeles highway, the stage is set for a conflict between the rich and the poor who occupy the same California canyon but find themselves on opposite sides of the "tortilla curtain." The novel explores themes relating to immigration, discrimination, social responsibility, environmental degradation, poverty, materialism, and the darker side of the American Dream. Often compared to John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Voltaire's *Candide*, it is a story with both humor and heartbreak that speaks volumes about the human condition.

I structured an entire English as a Second Language course around *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, approaching most of the class sessions as a book group. The students met first in small groups to respond to questions or discussion prompts, then came together in a circle to share the results.

At first, students were reluctant to speak in the big circle. Then, during our discussion of Chapter 1 (which deals extensively with childbirth), a male student complained, “This book is for girls, not men.” The class laughed, and it relieved a lot of tension. I thanked him for presenting a controversial interpretation and assured him that later chapters would deal with more stereotypically “men stuff” like war.

I think several students were feeling frustrated with the book, but they didn’t feel it was appropriate to criticize it, coming as they did from cultures in which it is not acceptable to contradict an instructor openly. Despite the indelicacy of his comment, I was grateful to this student for showing the others that here at least it was acceptable, even encouraged, to express their opinions.

Tara Smith
English as a Second Language



Using a Book to Explore Cultural Difference

Suggested techniques to help students consider issues represented in a book.

Modified debate

Have students pick a perspective from the book and debate a question from the point of view of that character or perspective.

Role Playing

Cast students as characters in the book and have them play out a key scenario. Repeat the scene, changing roles and practicing alternate endings.

Small Group Discussion

Introduce the concept of privilege. Break students into groups and ask them to identify instances of privilege depicted in the book. Reconvene the class and list the events on the board as they correspond to social locations of race, class, gender, and nationality.

Online Discussion Board

Post your own discussion questions or assign students to post them on different weeks. Require some kind of response.

The Tortilla Curtain tells parallel stories about illegal immigrants Cándido and América Rincón, who live on the bare edge of survival in a Southern California canyon, and the affluent Delaney and Kyra Mossbacher who live in a soon-to-be gated community at the top of the hill. The book opens with a collision that literally and figuratively sets the stage for injuries that will eventually nearly consume them all.

Using *The Tortilla Curtain* to Teach about Privilege

Dr. Nelta Edwards

*Assistant Professor of Sociology
University of Alaska Anchorage*

My brother was working as a maintenance supervisor for a low-income housing provider when he found a copy of *The Tortilla Curtain* in a garbage dumpster. Bryant is an avid reader, political activist, news junkie, and “salvage artist” (not to be confused with “dumpster diver”). He passed the book on to me, and I was so taken with it that I began assigning it in my upper-division sociology class on social stratification. Over the years, students have enjoyed the book and have been able to make links between the story and the class material. Until we adopted it as the Book of the Semester, however, I had never thought of using it to teach lower-division students.

I assigned *The Tortilla Curtain* to my Sociology 101 class as a supplement to chapters on social class and stratification, global stratification, and race and ethnicity. As students were reading the novel, they were also learning important sociological concepts such as social location, life chances, social mobility, stereotypes, salience principle, prejudice, discrimination, and racism. I also wanted to introduce the concept of privilege, and I used the book *Privilege, Power and Difference* by Allan G. Johnson as a resource.

For the first discussion period I asked students to get into small groups of two or three and talk about how the story begins, describing each of the main characters in terms of their social locations: that is, their race, class, gender, and nationality. When I brought the class back together, I asked a member from each group to describe a main character and then some minor characters. Students identified Delaney, Cándido, Kyra, and América as the main characters. They also identified the son Jordan, neighbors Jack and Jack Jr., the “bad” Mexican guy and his friend, and even the Mossbacher dogs as minor characters.

Using PowerPoint slides, I introduced the concept of privilege, which is defined as a benefit that members of some groups have that nongroup members do not have. Privilege exists when one group has something of value that is denied to others simply because of the groups that they belong to, rather than because of anything they have done or failed to do. As Peggy McIntosh put it in describing white privilege, it is like “an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks.”

I then listed some of the characteristics of privilege:

- It is hidden. Those who have it do not necessarily notice that they have it.
- It comes from societies and groups, rather than from individuals (although, of course, it shapes the personalities of individuals).
- It is the category that does not have to be explained: Gender—Race—Class—Sexuality—Ability.

Because I think that privilege is a difficult concept to grasp, I spent some time going over some examples, using Johnson as my source. As he points out, many aspects of privilege repeat from one category to another, although not all do.

White privilege (pages 25-27)

- Whites can choose whether to be conscious of their racial identity or to ignore it and regard themselves as simply human beings without a race.
- Whites can assume that when they go shopping, they'll be treated as serious customers, not as potential shoplifters or people without the money to make a purchase. When they want to cash a check or use a credit card, they can assume that they won't be hassled for additional identification and will be given the benefit of the doubt.
- White representation in government and the ruling circles of corporations, universities, and other organizations is disproportionately high.

Male privilege (pages 27-29)

- Men are more likely than women to control conversations and be allowed to get away with it and to have their ideas and contributions taken seriously, even those that were previously suggested by a woman and then dismissed or ignored.
- Men can usually assume that national heroes, success models, and other figures held up for general admiration will be men.
- In most professions and upper-level occupations, men are held to a lower standard than women. It is easier for a "good but not great" male lawyer to make partner than it is for a comparable woman.

Heterosexual privilege (pages 29-30)

- Heterosexuals are free to reveal and live their intimate relationships openly (referring to their partners by name, recounting experiences, going out in public together, displaying pictures on their desks at work) without being accused of "flaunting" their sexuality.
- Heterosexuals can move about in public without fear of being harassed or physically attacked because of their sexual orientation.
- Heterosexuals don't run the risk of being reduced to a single aspect of their lives, as if being heterosexual summed up the kind of person they are. Instead, they are viewed as complex human beings who happen to be heterosexual.

Disability status privilege (pages 30-32)

- Nondisabled people can assume that they will fit in at work and in other settings without having to worry about being evaluated and judged according to preconceived notions and stereotypes about people with disabilities.
- Nondisabled people can ask for help without having to worry that people will assume they need help with everything.
- Nondisabled people can succeed without people being surprised because of low expectations of their ability to contribute to society.

After the short lecture, I asked students to get back into their groups and come up with instances of privilege in the book. After about ten minutes I wrote "race," "class" "gender" and "nationality" on the board and asked the groups to report, listing the instances of privilege as the students reported them.

They noticed several instances of national and class privilege. The Mossbachers make sure their son has a nutritious breakfast; the Rincóns may not get anything to eat at all. When Delaney and Cándido collide in Chapter One, one worries about damages to his car, the other about damages to his body. Because Cándido is an undocumented Mexican, Delaney doesn't even take him to the hospital; he gives the battered man twenty dollars instead.

They also noticed the way privileges overlap and contradict each other. Because of her social class, Kyra is not as afraid of the bad Mexican and his friend as América is, and doesn't have to put up with the same kind of sexual harassment at her place of employment. Kyra's social class privilege trumps her gender disadvantage so much that it's hard to even imagine her putting up with the conditions of América's life.

Another day I devoted an entire class period to the showing of a documentary film called *Crossing Arizona* that looks at illegal immigration from several different local perspectives. On one side are farmers who depend on migrant labor, activists who oppose anti-immigration legislation, and humanitarians who provide water for immigrants crossing the desert. On the other side are the ranchers who mend fences and pick up garbage left by those passing through and a citizen militia who police the border with guns. Even though the economic and political realities have changed somewhat since the time in which *The Tortilla Curtain* is set, students were able to see on film real people like the fictional Cándido and América and witness the hardships they were willing to endure for the chance of a "better life."

The Tortilla Curtain was useful in teaching concepts that we, as a culture, prefer to ignore. We do not like to talk about social inequalities, particularly those based on race, gender, and class. We'd rather concentrate on all the ways in which hard work rewards people. This allows us to justify inequalities in society on the basis of merit (individual and group) instead of acknowledging the unearned privileges and disadvantages that accrue to individuals and groups based, usually, on the luck of birth.

Because college students are themselves likely to be from privileged groups in terms of their race and class, they may not always welcome analysis that points out the ways in which their privileges are unearned. Even students from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to adhere to the notion that our society is based on merit. Applying the concept to characters in a novel, however, helped students learn about privilege without feeling personally threatened. They were able to engage in conversations about social inequality and justice—of utmost importance to the health of any democracy—with thoughtfulness and civility.

Post script

I met T. C. Boyle when he came to Anchorage for a public reading in conjunction with our project. I told him the story about how I had become familiar with his book and asked him to sign a copy for my brother. He signed it "dumpster treasure." I thought, "Indeed."

Privilege exists when one group has something of value that is denied to others simply because of the groups that they belong to, rather than because of anything they have done or failed to do.

In the fall, I gave students in my graduate-level Epidemiology of Aging course the option of choosing either their textbook or the Book of the Semester for their required online discussion board topics. Our students are primarily mid-career professionals, average age 35 years old, working full time, and often married with families to care for. They are busy professionals, and it is difficult to get them involved in any activity that is not course-related. Most of them chose their textbook.

I tried again the next semester with my Environmental and Occupational Health course. This time I created a separate discussion board page and posted primary threads myself. Again, participation was limited. Nevertheless, those who did participate enjoyed the opportunity to discuss difficult questions and generated some interesting discussion.

Betty Buchan
Public Health

SAMPLE ONLINE DISCUSSION

The Tortilla Curtain

Betty Buchan, Public Health

Prompt: a passage from the book:

“Cándido knew what those gates were for and who they were meant to keep out, but that didn’t bother him. He wasn’t resentful. He wasn’t envious. He didn’t need a million dollars—he wasn’t born for that, and if he was he would have won the lottery. No, all he needed was work, steady work, and this was a beginning. He mixed concrete, dug holes, hustled as best he could with the hollow metal posts and the plastic strips, all the while amazed at the houses that had sprouted up here, proud and substantial, big gringo houses, where before, there’d been nothing.”¹

Professor’s primary thread:

Cándido doesn’t seem to suffer from a sense of entitlement, but many Americans do. Are we so spoiled that we consider it beneath us to do manual labor? Americans hire illegal immigrants because they will do menial jobs for almost no pay. Who is at fault here: us, for keeping the minimum wage too low for many Americans to earn a decent living, or them, for being willing to do the work that we won’t (or can’t) do? During the Great

¹ Boyle, p.166-167.

Depression of the 1930s, weren't most Americans grateful to have any work at all? Do we need something like that to happen periodically in history to bring what we have back into perspective?

Response: Student 1

I thought Cándido's attitude toward work, difficult and dirty work, was admirable. He was willing to do any amount of manual labor to provide for his wife and get ahead. His wife, América, was also willing to work incredibly hard. There was one scene where a pregnant América is working with harsh chemicals with no protective gloves provided, and she gets chemical burns on her hands. A decent immigration policy might prevent many of the abuses suffered by immigrants.

I do think many Americans feel a sense of entitlement and are loath to perform the types of manual labor that many immigrants gratefully perform. This always makes me think of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. As people get their base needs met, they become less willing to do certain activities or jobs in order to meet their higher-level needs. If the economy were to drastically worsen, I think many Americans who were formerly unwilling to do manual labor would become less picky if they needed to do it to pay for food and shelter.

Response: Student 2

I agree that there is a trend of Americans not wanting to do hard jobs. I have a couple friends in the construction business who have had a hard time finding and keeping employees, even when they are willing to pay more than other companies.

I like your thoughts on Maslow's hierarchy, but I wonder if the American approach is really helping us gain self-actualization. It seems we have the food and shelter part down, but when it comes to love and belonging, I'm not sure we have accomplished this as a society. The divorce rate continues to climb, the pace of life is always quickening, and more and more articles and books on dealing with stress, depression, anger, road rage, etc. are appearing.

I am proposing that manual labor (especially when done for other motives than money) helps us to reach our higher needs. Working in a garden connects us with beauty, reduces stress, and can provide food for meals. Repairing our homes leads to a satisfaction of self reliance. Walking to work gives us a chance to unwind and have exercise.

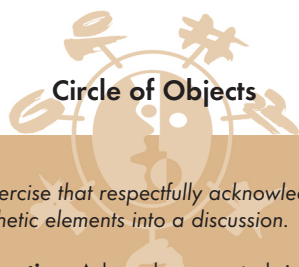
Some of the most self-actualized people I know live in a cabin with no running water or electricity. They work hard to provide the basic needs of water, heat, and some food. They also are well educated. This is a deliberate choice they have made. Instead of both spouses working, they have shaved off their expenses so that only one works while the other teaches the kids school, takes them to the symphony, music lessons, and rock climbing school. The kids also spend a year abroad during high school. I really admire them for living so deliberately, and they are able to do so many more self-actualized activities than the average American! Most Americans really are still stuck on shelter and food with bigger and bigger houses and a growing obesity/diabetes epidemic. Perhaps Cándido was more self-actualized than Delaney in the sense that his biggest love was his wife.

CIRCLE OF OBJECTS

One way to invite cultural awareness into a room is to openly and respectfully acknowledge each other's heritage. The Circle of Objects technique does this and more. It also engages the emotions, invites expressive reflection, honors the whole learner, and provides a kinesthetic experience that many learners will appreciate. For these reasons and more we introduced it in our faculty intensives. Many of us tried it out in our classrooms as well.

The exercise works somewhat like a show-and-tell. People are asked to bring in an object that has meaning to them with respect to their culture, heritage, or ethnic or class background. Often they choose things that mattered to their ancestors, such as a grandfather's watch, a grandmother's soup bowl, a piece of jewelry, something that has been passed down in the family, or something that symbolizes ancestors they never met or traditions they may or may not continue to observe. One by one, people volunteer to speak, setting their object in front of them or on a table in the middle of the room, and speaking uninterruptedly for two or three minutes about the object and its significance to them.

This exercise gets very emotional for both students and faculty members, partly because it's so personal and partly because it's so rare. Our academic culture does not typically make space for personal or emotional sharing, and especially not for vulnerable sharing (sharing something about your background that you wouldn't put on your resumé). Nor does it make much space for honoring nondominant ethnicities or class backgrounds. Those of us in the majority may not realize the significance of this, because we are so used to the dominant culture and its values. But others of us are painfully aware of it, every moment of the day.



Circle of Objects

An exercise that respectfully acknowledges the varieties of cultural heritage and introduces visual and kinesthetic elements into a discussion.

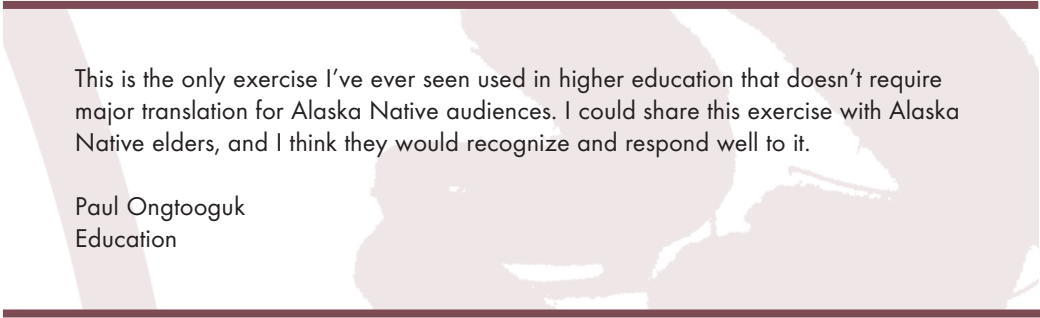
Preparation: Ask each person to bring in an object that reflects something about their ancestry, cultural heritage, class background, or other feature you wish to illuminate. Explain the purpose of the exercise and how it will work. Give them several days to choose their object and consider their response.

Sharing: Arrange the chairs in a circle, with a low table in the center. Invite each person, one at a time, to place their object on the table and to talk about its links to their culture, family history, class background, or other topic under discussion. After everyone has spoken, invite the group to share further comments or questions with each other.

Tips: Consider speaking first yourself, to model the act of self-disclosure and a time guideline of two or three minutes. After that, let the students rise and speak in whatever order they wish. Honor the silence between speakers.

This exercise was adapted from Brookfield and Preskill, who themselves adapted it from the Fetzer Institute in San Francisco.

In this exchange, it almost always happens that there will be people from the dominant ethnicity who suddenly realize they don't have much connection at all to their ancestors or their heritage. This lack of connection seems normal to them, but it's not at all normal to many who come to higher education from other regions, countries, or cultures. They do have a connection, and it's often very deep and sometimes very much in conflict with the dominant culture. You can start to see around the room how many different viewpoints the dominant culture misses by taking itself for granted.



This is the only exercise I've ever seen used in higher education that doesn't require major translation for Alaska Native audiences. I could share this exercise with Alaska Native elders, and I think they would recognize and respond well to it.

Paul Ongtooguk
Education

College can be a natural context for exploring one's identity; students often find themselves in a new setting, surrounded by new people and ideas. This essay describes how one of our colleagues used *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* in her freshman seminar course as a springboard to discussions of culture and conflicting world views. She followed those conversations with a unit on cultural and socioeconomic sensitivity that featured the Circle of Objects technique.

Encouraging Cultural and Socioeconomic Sensitivity

Dr. Maureen E. Austin

*Associate Professor of Environmental Science and Outdoor Studies
Alaska Pacific University*

At the beginning of their freshmen year, first-year students at Alaska Pacific University (APU) take a seminar course called Introduction to Active Learning. Here they are introduced to the basic framework of our undergraduate degree program, our portfolio process of guiding and documenting one's learning, and the active learning mission of the university. We teach this course during the Fall Block: a four-week intensive format at the start of the semester. The students take only one course during the block, meeting daily for several hours. The classes are usually small, with a dozen or perhaps fifteen students at a time.

I enjoy teaching the freshman seminar. I get to focus on a single class, and the students get to build a cohort, learn about the university, and work together on a shared project. Our first-year students are often new to either Anchorage or Alaska, and they are wide-eyed in their enthusiasm and open to learning about this university and state. At the same time, they can be a challenge. University life is all new to them. They're in a learning environment that doesn't force them to attend class, and they struggle to balance their new type of independence with the consequences of acting upon that freedom. Many are far from home for the first time, and while some feel invigorated by the experience, others feel isolated. Still in their teen years, many struggle with issues of identity and self-expression.

APU's emphasis on teaching and active learning encourages our faculty to try new ideas and test innovative approaches in the classroom. As a *Difficult Dialogues* participant, I was also eager to try some of the techniques I had learned in the faculty intensive. Anticipating that the majority of my first-year students would be environmental science majors, I decided to use our Book of the Semester, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, to engage them in a conversation about world views and the conflicts among them. The book is a vivid portrayal of a Hmong family and the California medical professionals who try to heal their very sick daughter. The Hmong approach life from an Eastern and mystical philosophy; the California doctors and social workers from a rational and very Western view of the world. I felt that conversations about this book would trans-

Many first-year students are far from home for the first time, and, while some feel invigorated by the experience, others feel isolated. Still in their teen years, many struggle with issues of identity and self-expression.

late into consideration of their own choice to become environmental scientists and to therefore follow a rational, scientific approach to the world. I wasn't expecting really deep discourse here; rather, I hoped to gently challenge their worldviews, encourage them to think about the scientific paradigm they would be learning, and notice how radically different it is from other cultural perspectives and indigenous worldviews.

I followed our book discussions with a unit of activities to encourage cultural and socioeconomic sensitivity. The unit included a class Code of Conduct, several journaling/writing exercises, and a Circle of Objects. In announcing the latter exercise, I instructed students to bring to class an object that, to them, represented something about

their background, cultural heritage, or socio-economic position.

Almost immediately, I sensed a heightened engagement from the class. Some students had questions, stopping me after class to ask me more about the assignment and what an "appropriate" object might be. I told them it could be anything, as long as they felt it represented something about their cultural heritage or socioeconomic background. Other students seemed to know right away what they would bring to class.

I allowed approximately one week for students to prepare for this activity, giving them time to reflect before choosing an object. Although it was apparent on the day of sharing that a few had just grabbed something at the last minute, most of them put quite a bit of thought into what their object

would be and what it represented. Some wrote or called home and asked for objects to be mailed; others called family members and asked for ideas. For these students, the assignment went beyond their individual selves and out into their families as well.

On the day the students shared their objects with one another, the overall tone was one of respect. We moved tables and chairs out of the way and sat on the floor, forming a large circle. Every student took a turn sharing his or her object. Each spoke eloquently about the object and what it represented, then placed the object in the center

of the circle. After all students had a chance to present and display their objects, I asked them to write in their journals, using the following prompts:

- What did you learn about yourself from this activity?
- What did you learn about your classmates from this activity?
- Did this activity help you increase your cultural awareness and sensitivity?

I gained a tremendous amount of respect for the students as a result of this exercise. I have to assume that it was more difficult for some than for others,

but they all participated, taking time to explain why they had selected the object and what it represented. Some talked about grandparents and their heritage. Others talked about special family members who meant a lot to them. A few brought in objects that represented their socioeconomic class, a class they considered to be low income. The courage with which they shared their experiences and the passion with which they spoke about being the first in their family to attend college was received with a mixture of respect and admiration. APU is a private, liberal arts university, and while many of our students receive some type of financial aid, I think most believe their classmates are from families that are fairly well-off financially.

Another outcome of this exercise was the level of respect and inspiration that students gained from each other. After it was over, we shared a few last thoughts. Several students voiced their appreciation for classmates who had spoken about growing up poor. They seemed to feel a real empathy for how that made their classmates feel and a real respect for how that background could be a source of both pride and strength. Several students commented that they had thought about sharing an object in this way, but decided against it because they were afraid others would make fun of them for being poor. It was particularly powerful to see the inspiration that these students derived from their classmates who were proud of their backgrounds.

I will use the Circle of Objects technique again, but sparingly and with an increased sense of respect. I learned how much effort it takes to facilitate the exercise, waiting through silences for students to volunteer to speak, and responding to their personal stories instead of the more usual assigned readings. The experience was powerful, but also tiring. It is not something to engage in lightly.

The courage with which they shared their experiences and the passion with which they spoke about being the first in their family to attend college was received by the class with a mixture of respect and admiration.

The Circle of Objects technique can be adapted to support a variety of course goals. This essayist uses it to personalize an important period of Alaska history and to help students connect their own sense of place with concepts of land and place that are central to Alaska Native cultures. The author suggests additional adaptations for archaeology, anthropology, sociology, economics, and other subject areas as well.

Using the Circle of Objects To Teach About Place

Paul Ongtooguk

Assistant Professor of Secondary Education

University of Alaska Anchorage

I was intrigued by the Circle of Objects technique and decided to try it out in my upper-division Issues in Alaska Native Education course. This course introduces future teachers to certain aspects of Alaska history that are relevant to how educators understand Alaska Native societies today. No one can really understand the contemporary life of Alaska's Native communities without some understanding of the cultural history as well.

One of the challenges in helping university students understand Alaska Native societies is to make the issues real. Students' preconceptions are often limited to historical and museum snapshots; the result is that Alaska Native people are viewed as two-dimensional social anomalies. Students

We discussed what we might mean by sense of place: it could be a ground for personal development and image, a foundation from which sprang family roots and values, or a platform to which a person could return and understand and be understood.

most often assume that assimilation into white society is desirable and that successful Alaska Natives want to and have been assimilated. It is important that they learn to challenge these assumptions, however. In many of the Native communities and neighborhoods where they will be working, a ring. Assimilation is being rejected or accepted only on Native terms.

The Circle of Objects exercise seemed like a good way to help students relate to certain land issues that have been, and continue to be, central to Alaska Native cultures. I asked students to bring in an object (or a representation of an object) that was important to their sense of place. We discussed what we might mean by sense of place: it could be a ground for personal development and image, a foundation from

which sprang family roots and values, or a platform to which a person could return and understand and be understood. The object had to have value to the student, and it had to be something that they could share and discuss.

In general, the exercise went very well. The variety of objects was interesting and included a hunting knife that had been used on the family land; a jar of sand from a beach property; pieces of driftwood; dried flowers; a hand-knitted object. The students assumed this was a community-building activity, and they were attentive to each other and engaged. They seemed to appreciate the opportunity to get to know each other in something other than the standard “Where are you from and how long have you been in Alaska?” format.

I was surprised, however, by the amount of time it took. Students truly wanted to share the stories behind the objects, and since the sharing was so personal it was difficult to interrupt. Next time I might use an hourglass to focus students on the length of their presentations.

Connecting Politics and History to a Sense of Place

The most important piece of land use legislation in Alaska’s recent history is the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), passed in 1971 to resolve Alaska Native rights to lands based on traditional use. In other states, treaty settlements created reservations and transferred Native lands to tribal governments. In Alaska, Congress went in a different direction and actually revoked several reservations before creating a special class of state-chartered Native regional and village corporations to hold the forty-plus million acres of lands kept by Alaska Native peoples. In payment for taking the rest of Alaska, \$962.5 million also went to the new Native corporations.

This departure from the treaty/tribal government model is an ongoing social experiment involving the lives and futures of the Alaska Native peoples. Native corporations are now some of the largest corporations in the state. Alaska Natives who were alive at the time of the legislation are original shareholders; shares may not be sold without a special vote of the shareholders. With Native corporations controlling the largest private lands in Alaska, ANCSA is important to all Alaskans and, indeed, all Americans as well. At the end of it all, though, for most Alaska Natives, ANCSA was about trying to protect and pass on some of our lands for future generations.

ANCSA is easily understood as a piece of legislation with specific terms, but less easily understood for the role it plays in shaping contemporary Alaska Native cultures and the lives of real people. For that, students need an understanding of the importance of land to Native life and culture.

Hence, prior to the discussion of ANCSA, I returned to the Circle of Objects exercise and asked the students to think about some questions with their own place in mind: How would you feel if someone took the land that your place was on? How would you feel if you were denied access to your place? How would you feel if someone were going to destroy your place and build a parking garage?

It became clear that the work undertaken was years in the making. It also became clear that it could only have been accomplished by a people who valued their land and who were willing to fight for it through a court system that did not understand or value their history and culture. The students were resoundingly impressed.

Students discussed these questions and the alienation, resentment, and feelings of helplessness that would result if these places, so central to their sense of self, were lost.

One of the underappreciated aspects of ANCSA is the fact that Alaska Native people successfully engaged in a mammoth effort to prove their land claims. Since Alaska Natives had no system of written property titles and deeds, they had to be methodical and assiduous in collecting documentation that would be understood and validated in a system of Western government. I asked the students an additional question: If you lacked a system of property deeds and titles, how would you prove that the place belonged to you? Students brainstormed ideas that would demonstrate ownership and how records might be accumulated that would be accepted by the court system. The problems of accumulating such records became apparent very quickly.

I then showed them some of the books that Alaska Natives compiled in response to the need to show “traditional use and occupancy.” One such example is *Haa Aaani Our Land: Tlingit and Haida Land Rights and Use* by Walter R. Goldschmidt and Theodore H. Haas, which contains personal

The power of this technique seems to lie in the manner in which students are drawn into a consideration of concepts from their own unique vantage points. The objects are tangible and their value and importance to the person is articulated and public.

accounts, oral histories, detailed maps, and records of anthropological evidence. We examined this book in some detail, and students were very impressed with the quantity of records and stories. We examined the records to see if questions critical to the court had been demonstrated: where, when and how the land was used. I also stressed the fact that this had been done without the benefit of modern technology and without the level of resources and support that are used to generate most government reports today. It became clear to the students that the work undertaken was years in the making. It also became clear that it could only have been accomplished by a people who valued their land and who were willing to fight for it through a court system that did not understand or value their history and culture. The students were resoundingly impressed.

Again, it took a considerable amount of time for students to make these connections. The first time I tried this technique I did not allow enough opportunity for discussion, and only one student really made the connections for which I had hoped. I had assumed that the Circle of Objects activity would provide the framework for understanding ANCSA without additional time and discussion, but that assumption was wrong. I had to generate those additional questions to explicitly help students transfer their experience with place to the Alaska Native experience with place. Covering essential content is always an issue in university classes, but since the concept of land and place is so fundamental to understanding Alaska Native cultures today, I will continue to support the Circle of Objects activity as a way of facilitating this understanding.

How other disciplines might use the technique

A Circle of Objects exercise focused on land and a sense of place has relevance to teaching history across the world. Issues of land ownership have generated countless wars, created and destroyed multiple empires, and led to the displacement of millions, if not billions, of people. American and Canadian history cannot be understood without considering the displacement of American Indian, Alaska Native, and First Nations peoples. Likewise, current events in the Middle East, particularly the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, are grounded in issues of land ownership, displacement of peoples, and conveyance of property. The exercise can help university students consider how people, including themselves, value the land from which they came and in which they have their roots. When the concept is personalized for them in this way, they can better understand why land rights have been, and will continue to be, such contentious issues both locally and globally.

The technique lends itself to other applications as well. Focused on the family, it could be valuable in anthropology and archaeology classes, where objects can otherwise seem isolated and disconnected from families, communities, and cycles of use. Too often, students view the debris but don't make the connections to the lives of real people. Likewise, sociology classes might use it as an entrée into more theoretical discussions and models of the family and extended family. Economists might expand their students' concept of the value of goods and services by having students share and discuss things that are of great value to them. American government might become more relevant to some students if the personal property laws and protections were related to their own lives through the Circle of Objects.

The power of this technique seems to lie in the manner in which students are drawn into a consideration of concepts from their own unique vantage points. The objects are tangible, and their value and importance to the person is articulated and public. Once this background knowledge has been stimulated, the creative instructor can help the students jump across cultures and time and invigorate theoretical and abstract concepts with personal connections that vastly increase understanding.

Not everyone was completely enamored with the Circle of Objects. In addition to a general reluctance to spend too much time off topic, there were objections based on theoretical and political grounds. This essay discusses the politics of self-disclosure and describes a creative way one of our colleagues resolved her objections by using the exercise to help students see and articulate the links between personal experience and professional decision-making.

Coming to Terms with the Circle of Objects: Resistance and Transformation

Dr. Tracey Kathleen Burke

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As I understand it, the point of the Circle of Objects exercise is to come to an appreciation of how much our various individualities are shaped by social position and family. As a community-building exercise, it is fine, even powerful. However, because we engaged in it on the day of our faculty intensive that focused on race, class, ethnicity, and culture, I presume the larger point our

When the Circle was described to us and we were instructed to bring our objects, I sighed internally. This was going to be like most diversity classes and workshops I have attended, relying heavily on self-disclosure among classmates. It was going to consist of exactly what I intentionally do not do in my own undergraduate diversity class.

program organizers intended was to help us help our students transcend stereotypes. I have serious reservations about the Circle of Objects toward this end.

When the Circle was described to us and we were instructed to bring our objects, I sighed internally. This was going to be like most diversity classes and workshops I have attended, relying heavily on self-disclosure among classmates. It was going to consist of exactly what I intentionally do not do in my own undergraduate diversity class. I find the logic of self-disclosure to be antithetical both to combating stereotypes and to promoting ideals of diversity.

As near as I can tell, the logic of self-disclosure activities in this context is this: oppression is basically an individual or relationship-specific phenomenon. Students (and faculty and others) fear/hate/dismiss a group because the group is an abstraction rather than real people; therefore, knowing

a member of the group will make the group as a whole more benign, and students will then feel more positively toward all members. For example, getting to know an African American student as “Mike” rather than “the black guy” will make him more human; therefore, all black men become more human. Learning about hardships he has faced (and by virtue of his being in the classroom has

presumably overcome) makes Mike seem stronger/more disciplined/more responsible than the stereotypical black man; therefore, the stereotype must be wrong.

The problem here is twofold. First, the logic relies on the kind of generalization from case study to population that researchers go to great pains to avoid, for very good reason. And second, the power of institutional and discursive forces in oppression is wholly ignored and therefore uncontested.

To illustrate. Let's say our hypothetical student Mike is indeed a wonderful person. For the classmate who has not personally known any black men but who has the media-driven impression that they are all scary drug dealers, knowing that Mike is not a scary drug dealer is important. But Mike is no more representative of the group "black men" than an imagined—or real—drug dealer. For some classmates, Mike ends up in the untenable position of having to be more than himself; he becomes the new black man. For other classmates, Mike is recognized as a good guy, but there is in fact no generalization, and the scary drug dealer remains the prototypical black man.

While Mike as case study might open doors to a deeper discussion of the larger societal forces that contribute to his experience, with Mike as our classmate we are not likely to go there. Said differently, person-based discussions tend to be weighted toward the personal rather than the political. A discussion about racism and white privilege is quite likely to be personal to Mike already, but it should also be personal to his classmates of all backgrounds. Focusing on Mike at the outset makes it seem like it's Mike's problem alone.

There are many good questions we might raise here. What circumstances surround instances of racism and white privilege? What assumptions undergird differential treatment? When do the rest of us replicate those circumstances and act as if we believe those assumptions even if we do not? What can we do to change the circumstances, however blatantly or subtly, to reduce the odds of the differential treatment being repeated?

I would argue that exploring these larger questions is more important than looking at individual instances of differential treatment. Few people would actually argue that members of racial minorities, cultural minorities, and other historically oppressed groups are intrinsically "bad" or "less than" simply as a function of that group membership. Mike's classmates would not claim that all black men are scary drug dealers. However, if that is their image of the black man, Mike alone will be hard-pressed to challenge it, and if the image remains intact, very little else in their thinking or behavior will change either. Likewise, people who do not believe gays and lesbians are less-than and who support full civil rights for sexual minorities can still be surprised if children play house with two mommies; their world is still constructed as heterosexual such that an unspoken rule/expectation for the game "playing house" is that there should be a mommy and a daddy. These expectations are much more insidious than outright negative characterizations, and these are what I hope my students learn to examine.

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— and change behaviors —
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If we want to raise awareness—and change behaviors—regarding discrimination and oppression, we need to directly confront the assumptions, circumstances, and histories that contribute to them. This is no easy matter, especially when multiple forms of difference collide. In my field (social work), we confront this most often around socially conservative religious beliefs and sexual minorities. How does one honor both groups: gays, lesbians, bisexuals, etc., and people who genuinely believe them to be doing wrong, perhaps at risk of damnation? I have not found easy solutions or reliable ways to handle this in class, but I do find it wholly distracting to use self-disclosure as an entry point for thinking about it.

Adaptation

Because of all this, I was very skeptical, that day at the intensive, that the Circle of Objects exercise would yield any new insights. I chose my object with resignation and expected to mentally drift off. To my surprise, however, I remained engaged throughout the exercise, listening to my colleagues. We got to know each other better that morning, and I think our level of group cohesiveness increased. I did not leave the activity having learned much about historically oppressed groups, nor do I believe that what Alaska Native faculty members shared changed my thinking about Natives in general. But I came to appreciate the Circle of Objects as a mechanism for community-building, where the focus is in fact personal relationships but not broader political phenomena.

I was still not about to adopt the exercise for my diversity class, but after this experience I was no longer opposed to using it at all. A conversation with my colleague Tracy Stewart gave me an idea that I thought might work in my practice methods courses. Last spring, I experimented, trying it out in two sections of a graduate class.

I came to appreciate the Circle of Objects as a mechanism for community-building, where the focus is in fact personal relationships but not broader political phenomena.

I used the exercise to help students think about the ways that personal experience and self-knowledge inform professional social work practice decisions. This was part of a unit on the sources and legitimacy of professional knowledge that included discussions of evidence-based practice (empirically validated interventions), professional practice wisdom (insights gained through clinical experience), and whether and how to include client knowledges in decision-making. Including personal experience in this mix of knowledges is perilous because it's so very prey to bias; but since it

happens, I choose to address it straight on and promote mindfulness and care.

I had the students bring in two objects: one that represented them personally, as in the original Circle, and one that represented them professionally. I spoke first, modeling the kind of commentary I hoped they'd provide. We went around the circle once talking about the meanings or histories of the personal objects. Then we came around a second time, backwards so the last person started, explaining the professional objects. Finally, we commented on the connections, on how the self-knowledge or experience or learning described in relation to the first object shapes us as professionals and informs our work.

The discussion dynamics were different in each of the two sections, related to the very different quality of pre-existing relationships among the students (in other words, related to the level of community in the classroom). In the small class, consisting of part-time students who had been together as a cohort for some years, there was virtually no risk involved in sharing personal information, which they all acknowledged. Indeed, because of their history together, the lesbian student was able to point out in a way that raised no tensions that it was a function of heterosexual privilege that two people could use pictures of their families as their personal objects. There was also some discussion of whether the label “gay” as a derogatory term used by pre-teens was really homophobic or just(?) about identity issues. The group did not reach a consensus, but people agreed the conversation was valuable, and I do not think anyone was shut down.

The level of intimacy was less in the second section, which was larger and in which the students were much newer to each other. A few participated

in an off-the-cuff fashion; most, however, took the activity very seriously. There were some creative objects and heartfelt explanations. One woman choked up when it was her turn to draw connections. Perhaps the most humorous moment was the transition between two women sitting beside each other, one of whom used her wedding ring as her personal object, the other of whom used her divorce papers. At a smooth moment when I judged the woman would not feel personally attacked, I pointed out how a wedding ring might seem like a token of heterosexual privilege, even though same-sex couples also use rings to signify commitment.

I was very impressed with the students and the modified exercise, both times. However, the second object is crucial. Had we stopped after discussing the personal objects, people would have had a bit more information about each other, but it would have been hanging out there, unconnected to the class itself. The second objects and the discussion of connections did segue fruitfully back to the course material; it gave the self-disclosure a context and purpose.

Students’ reactions support mine. Several said they found the activity useful despite initial skepticism. “I didn’t really get the point until we had to talk about the linkages,” one woman said. Others nodded their agreement.

I used the exercise to help students think about the ways that personal experience and self-knowledge inform professional social work practice decisions.

VOICING MINORITY VIEWS

We tried out Brookfield and Preskill’s Hatful of Quotes technique in our faculty intensive and found it to be successful at allowing participants (particularly those of color) to express concerns about our own interactions—concerns they might not have voiced without the safety of the structured exercise.

Libby pulled a selection of quotes from the text that critiqued the whole idea of what we were attempting to do by engaging in difficult dialogues. The quotations were controversial statements in their own right, voicing minority points of view from an academic source outside of our group. They introduced concepts such as repressive tolerance (practices that give the illusion of honoring diversity while actually supporting the status quo) and pointed out the “implicit legitimacy of the center.” One of them critiqued the entire educational enterprise as “an ideological state apparatus... that works to ensure the perpetuation of dominant ideology.” See page 106 for a sample.

She placed multiple copies of each quote in a basket, circulated the basket among participants, and asked them each to draw out a quote. She then invited people to comment on the statement they had selected, in no particular order. Others with the same quotation sometimes chimed in immediately and sometimes waited until a later point in the discussion to respond.

During the discussion, many majority participants reflected on ways in which their role as authority in the classroom might unintentionally reinforce status quo values. Several minority participants told stories from their own personal or professional lives in which they had directly witnessed or experienced marginalizing dynamics similar to those in the quotations; they indicated that they felt more free to speak because of the academic credibility of the theories articulated in the text.

A graphic featuring a stylized hat with various symbols (a star, a gear, a leaf, a flower) on its brim. The text "Hatful of Quotes" is written across the front of the hat.

Hatful of Quotes

A technique for introducing provocative ideas from an outside source.

Before class:

- Select five or six passages from a text.
- Transfer them to small slips of paper, with each quote appearing on at least two slips of paper.

In class:

- Put the quotes in a hat (or other suitable container).
- Ask students to draw a slip from the hat.
- Give them several minutes to think about the quote they drew.
- Then ask everyone to read his or her quote aloud and comment on it to the group.

*Adapted from Brookfield and Preskill, *Discussion as a Way of Teaching**

One of the primary intents of this exercise, when used in a classroom setting, is to encourage all students to voice an opinion of some kind, while avoiding putting any of them on the spot. Those who are least confident can wait until they have heard several other students express their thoughts on a particular quote and then simply agree or disagree with previous speakers when their turn comes. This allows teachers to balance the competing concerns of wanting to develop confidence in all of their students about speaking their minds while not forcing any student to speak in a way which may be experienced as intimidating or oppressive. This was a minor concern, however, within an all-faculty group.

The exercise gave us a place to start having a respectful difficult dialogue of our own. Afterwards, participants were able to reference the critiques from this exercise and say to their colleagues, “Remember that quote about how sometimes it might look like we’re teaching something by entertaining another point of view, but in fact we’re just reinforcing our own? Could that be what’s happening right here, right now?” The earlier discussion, and the quotes, gave minority speakers both the language and the legitimacy to surface and challenge problematic dynamics in the room and a basis for conducting (or averting the need for) difficult dialogues within our own learning community.



Strategies like this one went a long way toward creating an inclusive atmosphere in our third intensive, paving the way for the group to take on a difficult dialogue of their own choosing. See page 242.

Quotes From Our Hat

Consider, as we did in our faculty intensives, the following quotations from Brookfield and Preskill's Discussion as a Way of Teaching.

"Marcuse (1965) argues that an emphasis on including a diversity of views and intellectual or racial traditions in discussion is often repressive, not liberating. When they experience repressive tolerance (which is the term Marcuse uses to describe this situation) people mistakenly believe they are participating in discussions characterized by freedom of speech and an inclusive emphasis on diverse ideas, when in fact those same discussions actually reinforce dominant ideology. Repressive tolerance is a tolerance for just enough challenge to an unjust system to convince people that they live in a truly open society in which dissenting voices are expressed and heard. As long as people believe this, they will lose the energy to try to change the system, even though in reality nothing has altered." (p.255)

"...when an alternative idea is included alongside a mainstream one, people's prior familiarity with the mainstream ensures that the alternative, oppositional perspective is inevitably seen as an exotic option rather than a plausible viewpoint around which a new worldview can be constructed...Certain centrist ideas are always given greater credence. They are subtly favored, presented by both participants and leaders as more 'reasonable' or 'balanced.' So while alternative interpretations and opinions are pursued, the fact that they are framed as alternatives only serves to support the implicit legitimacy of the center." (p.255-6)

"Structural analysis views education as an ideological state apparatus...that works to ensure the perpetuation of dominant ideology. It does this partly by teaching values that support that ideology, and partly by immersing students in practices that are ideologically determined. Prime among such practices is the conduct of discussion...In the ways they respond to different comments, teachers ensure that certain perspectives are marginalized and discredited while others are portrayed as 'common sense,' the clear choice of those with intelligence and discernment...To help us understand how this happens, the concept of cultural capital proposed by the French thinker, Pierre Bourdieu (1986), is useful. Cultural capital refers to the style and patterns of speaking, dress and posture, the command of language, and the knowledge of cultural matters that one brings to an educational situation. Differences in the amount of cultural capital people possess explain why students from middle- and upper-class homes consistently do better in school than working class students." (p.249)

There are many ways to use quotations to stimulate classroom discussion. Brookfield and Preskill describe several, and many of us have adapted techniques we discovered from other sources or made up on our own. This essay describes an exercise in which the instructor used quotes by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to affirm or challenge key statements from the civil rights movement and to help her students connect more personally with civil rights issues.

Using Quotes to Affirm and Challenge: Effective Teaching Strategy and Discussion Builder

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A slightly modified version of a technique involving quotations worked well in my classroom, both as a means of provoking discussion and as a means of reinforcing substantive course content. I got the idea from Brookfield and Preskill's discussion-starter advice: Use Quotes to Affirm or Challenge.

Method

In honor of Alaska Civil Rights Day (Martin Luther King, Jr. Day), the university encouraged faculty to address in their classes some aspect of civil rights. Because the civil rights movement is part of my substantive course content, I was able to devote approximately an hour and 15 minutes of class time to this activity. The activity also required approximately two hours of preparation prior to class.

Using the course text and various web sites, I created and printed a list of 23 quotes from Martin Luther King, Jr. I cut these apart into individual slips, each with a single quotation. I asked students to divide themselves into groups of three or four, and passed out two different quotes at random to each group. I then asked the groups to discuss the quotes among themselves and decide whether to affirm or challenge them in light of current social and political conditions. I told them that if they could not reach an agreement, students could speak individually rather than as a group.

I gave them about fifteen minutes to review their quotes and discuss their positions. Then I asked each group to choose a spokesperson, and we went around the class with each spokesperson reading the quote and explaining the group's position. Students from the class at large then responded to the quote and to the group's position.

Assessment

I was surprised at the high level of engagement, in part because Alaska Civil Rights Day coincided with the beginning of our spring semester, and I held the exercise on the first day of class. Therefore, students were unfamiliar with me and with each other. I did precede this exercise with one in building a course Code of Conduct, which I think was important in breaking the ice for this new group. I also think allowing students to choose their own group was helpful. Presumably, most of them had selected a familiar face with whom to sit when they walked in, so that most of the students knew at least one of their small-group members.

There was no resistance to the desk shuffling and group formation process, and no resistance to my distributing quotes at random. The students remained on task for most of the allotted small-group time, and approached the exercise seriously. I detected no flippancy in their responses and received no challenges to the value of the exercise. This was a culturally diverse group, and students appeared to be sensitive to that in phrasing their comments. As far as I could tell from circling the room and listening in, all of the students expressed themselves during the small-group discussion. Many of the small groups adopted the technique of going around the group in order to hear each student's position.

Students also responded positively to the whole-group discussion. They appeared to be genuinely interested in hearing the quotes other groups had addressed and willing to discuss the decisions to challenge or affirm. I did not observe any student who appeared to be completely disengaged from the exercise, and I estimate that more than half of the 36 students present spoke out spontaneously at least once during the large group discussion.

In addition to generating highly successful dialogue, this exercise had a positive effect on student engagement with civil rights issues throughout the semester.

In addition to generating highly successful dialogue, this exercise had a positive effect on student engagement with civil rights issues throughout the semester. When these issues arose, students invariably seemed to perk up, expressing spontaneous comments and questions.

Their understanding of the text and lecture material was particularly sophisticated in this area. I think this may have been, in part, because they focused intently on the

problem and articulated their own feelings at the beginning of the semester. Moreover, through their careful consideration of Dr. King's own words, standing alone as individual statements, I believe the students related to the tragedies and the challenges of the civil rights movement on a very personal level. There can be no better path to understanding.

I found the Hatful of Quotes technique to be effective with a group of educators in a professional development course last summer. I clipped out pieces of paper with individual quotes borrowed from a required reading on leadership, then folded the papers and tossed them in a hat. I had more quotes than there were people in the group. The first thing I noticed was how eager participants were to select a quote, with some choosing more than one. After taking a few minutes for quiet reflection, I invited people to share their quote and their own views on it. The class participants who did not often initiate discussion did so more frequently with this exercise, and all participants shared their views freely, which led to a dynamic, stimulating discussion. As a cross-cultural educator, I plan to use this technique again to create more democratic, equitable, and inclusive group discussions.

Alice Hisamoto
Education

THE FIVE MINUTE RULE

To a large extent, we focused on Alaska Native cultures as our entry point to questions of race, ethnicity, and culture. It was an obvious choice, due both to geography and to the ongoing efforts at both universities to recruit, retain, and graduate more Alaska Native students. In addition, Alaska Native issues seem largely invisible within the curriculum and the academy at large. There is a pervasive, often unconscious stereotype that classifies indigenous cultures as exotic historical or anthropological case studies rather than contemporary and equally valid ways of living and knowing the world. Few non-Natives are aware of the ongoing effects of colonialism on our Native students and citizens or the critical insights on global issues that indigenous cultures have to share.

A pivotal moment in each of the faculty intensives came from Phyllis Fast's application of the Five Minute Rule. The technique offers a simple way of taking an invisible or marginalized perspective and entertaining it respectfully for a short period of time. The only people who get to speak are those who can say something positive about it. The idea is that those who find it dangerous to entertain an idea that is against their value or belief system may find it safer in this context. After all, it's only five minutes, and you don't have to speak. When the five minutes are over, everyone can return to his or her own personal perspectives and carry on, perhaps changed, perhaps not.

The perspective Phyllis presented was that of Ernie Norton, an Inupiat from northwestern Alaska. All his academic life, from elementary school through his anthropology baccalaureate, Ernie's science teachers have expected him to learn and adopt the Western (Linnean) system of plant and animal classification based on species, genus, family, phyla, and order. But the Western system doesn't make sense to Ernie; it violates what he knows to be true from his own experience.

Phyllis based her presentation on a 1995 paper by Norton and UAA anthropology Professor



The Five Minute Rule

A way of taking an invisible or marginalized perspective and entertaining it respectfully for a short period of time.

Rule

Anyone who feels that a particular point of view is not being taken seriously has a right to point this out and call for this exercise to be used.

Discussion

The group then agrees to take five minutes to consider the merits of this perspective, refrain from criticizing it, and make every effort to believe it. Only those who can speak in support of it are allowed to speak, using the questions below as prompts. All critics must remain silent.

Questions and prompts

- What's interesting or helpful about this view?
- What are some intriguing features that others might not have noticed?
- What would be different if you believed this view, if you accepted it as true?
- In what sense and under what conditions might this idea be true?

This technique was adapted from Brookfield and Preskill, who based it on Peter Elbow's "the believing game."

Kerry Feldman called “Nijsaq and napaqtuq: Issues in Inupiaq Eskimo life-form classification and ethnosience.” The taxonomy this paper articulates differs markedly from the Western version; it is based on function as well as morphology and acknowledges a human relationship to the animals and their role within the greater Inupiaq society. Phyllis explained the Inupiaq perspective briefly and then, applying the Five Minute Rule, asked her colleagues to consider how the world would look different if this was “how things are.”

It has been a powerful exercise for our groups. The effort of trying to think like an Inupiat, even for just five minutes, has challenged several participants to their very epistemological foundations. Others realized that they’d never seriously entertained the perspective of many people in their state, including some of their students. A few began to see the Inupiaq viewpoint as complementary to, and equally legitimate with, the scientific and academic reality in which they were steeped. For some, the act of respectfully considering a marginalized perspective led to serious soul-searching about their own constructions of reality.

EXERCISE: BELIEVE THIS

So here’s how this works. For the next five minutes, set aside your own point of view and entertain the one below. Don’t listen to the critical thoughts that pop into your head. Instead, ask yourself: What’s interesting about this view? How would things be different if this was how you understood the world, or if this perspective were true, or if it were the dominant view? After five minutes, feel free to return to your original perspective.

Nijsaq and Napaqtuq: Another Way of Thinking about Animals and Plants

While still in grade school, Ernie Norton was told by a Western teacher that the creature he knew as *aaglu* (killer whale) was related to the one he knew as *agviq* (bowhead whale). This didn’t make sense to him. He knew these animals; he’d seen them, hunted them, watched them hunt. He did not, however, perceive them to be related. From his perspective, they were not in the same category or family at all. Trying to think of them that way, he said, made his brain hurt.

Ernie’s language, Inupiaq, has words for some of the major life-form categories that certain ethnographers recognize as universals. Fish are *iqaluk*, birds are *tigmat*. Each

species has its own name as well: salmon are *iqalugruaq*, ravens *tulugaq*. But there is no classification for mammal, at least not as most English-speakers would define it.

What Ernie has instead is *niqsaq*. The word refers to several species of large animals as well as the method with which they are hunted. Bowhead whale, beluga whale, bearded seal, spotted seal, polar bear, walrus...all these are, or can be, *niqsaq*. These creatures have many things in common. They are big, they breathe air (they are not fish), and they can swim. They live all or some of their lives in the sea or on sea ice. Humans hunt them for food. They taste good.

Niqsaq also refers to a type of angu or hunting that takes place on the sea or sea ice. It is not the same as *saavit*, or hunting that takes place on land. It must be traditional (that now includes the option of a rifle), and it requires skill and bravery, about which one could dance in recounting the story of the hunt. *Niqsaq* indicates that there was blood shed, that a hunter risked his life to kill the animal. A beluga swimming in the water is not *niqsaq*, it is *sisuaq*. If it's taken by a net, still *sisuaq*. If it's found washed up on the beach, dead by some natural process, *sisuaq*. Only if it has been taken by traditional methods does it become a *niqsaq* animal.

Two kinds of what English speakers call whales—bowheads and belugas—are, or can be, *niqsaq*. Both are hunted traditionally on the sea or near the sea ice, and both make good muktuk. Two others are not. The grey whale is a phony, like a blank bullet. Its blubber doesn't taste good. Killer whales cannot be *niqsaq* either; they are hunters, like humans. They are vengeful; if harmed, they will return to take their revenge. They are not shot at even in sport, and although you could eat one if you found it washed up on the beach, it would not be *niqsaq*.

In the plant world, Ernie has no generic word for "tree." Instead he has *nappaqtuq*, which refers to what English-speakers call spruce trees. There are no other kinds of trees in Ernie's language, only *nappaqtuq*. The word means "this thing is standing up firmly. Nothing can knock it down easily." It has a strength and firmness that makes it ideal for building a home with. People who live along the Noatak River once called themselves *Naupaktomiut*: "people of the trees" or "people of the spruce." As the only living thing that stays green all year round, it has a spiritual power that cannot be taken away by winter.

All other plants are either *uqpik* (bushes) or *ivik* (grass). *Uqpik* come in two sizes: *uqpikpak* (big bushes, willow, all trees other than spruce) and *uqpikuraq* (small bushes like blueberries and the like). *Uqpikpak* (big bushes) are good for burning, but not for building. They are deciduous, greening up in the summer, and dying back in the winter. One has only to look outside on a winter day to see the difference between the full dark green spruce (*nappaqtuq*) and bare brown birch (*uqpikpak*) as they are silhouetted against the sky. The birch are obviously bushes; the spruce obviously a tree.

The mention of his brain hurting reveals the depths to which people become attached to and formed by the classification systems present in their native cultural systems...Although Ernie Norton is well educated now in Western thought, he still does not believe that *aaglu* really is a whale. I do not think many Western people, even some anthropologists, grasp this. Education in the western system does not necessarily cancel out Native categories of reality and feelings about these things. Our current education system in Alaska, and perhaps elsewhere in the far North, can suffer from such unconscious ethnocentrism.

Kerry Feldman
Anthropology

The believing game

What happens when you try to believe this view? Can you do it easily, or does it make your brain hurt? If you find it difficult or even impossible to “believe” in *niqsaq* and *napaaqtuq*, then you are beginning to understand what it was like for Ernie when he was expected to master the distinctions so common in the English-speaking world.

What do you notice or find interesting about this view? A common observation is that it’s place-based, specific to a particular place where a particular people live and hunt along the sea ice. Another thing that stands out is that it’s relational. The understanding and classification system is not independent of us and our human experience, the way Western science tries to be. Instead it is openly dependent on the relationship between humans and nature. As one researcher has put it, these categories are not only “good to think” but also “good to act upon” in prescribed ways because of their wide cultural usefulness.

How would things be different if this was your perspective...the way you saw the world? It’s a good question, isn’t it?

Speaking the language

Inupiat - refers to the people

Inupiaq - refers to the language and culture of the people

Niqsaq: large animals hunted on or near the sea ice using traditional methods; also those methods themselves; also the skill and bravery involved; also the way you could tell the whole story in a dance.

Agviq: bowhead whale

Sisuaq: beluga whale

Ugruk: bearded seal

Qasigiaq: (small) spotted seal

Nanuq: polar bear

Aiviq: walrus

Background on *Niqsaq* and *Napaaqtuq*

I got interested in this topic while teaching an anthropology research methods course. As we discussed the research methods of ethno-science (or how cultural groups know, understand and classify the world around them), one of the students, Ernie Norton, was having difficulty understanding what I meant by classification systems. I suggested interviewing him about his own culture's classifications of life forms, hoping that as a respondent in such research he would come to understand what it was about. Eventually we agreed to write a paper together about our mutual discoveries.

In the paper, I examined theories of the anthropological linguist Cecil Brown regarding folk taxonomies for plants and animals. While all cultural groups engage in classification of the things around them (some X is viewed as a kind of some Y), each culture identifies different attributes as a basis for seeing things as alike or unlike or for not grouping them with anything else at all. Brown's examination of 144 languages led him to argue that 1) there are five potentially universal folk life form classifications for plants and animals; 2) one could predict the order in which they would occur if the cultural/linguistic group did not name all five; and 3) life form classifications are based solely on morphology (appearance). Most of these arguments and predictions seemed to be correct for Inupiaq, but there were a few interesting exceptions.

I learned that the main reason Ernie had trouble understanding the research method was that Inupiaq has so few classifications for plants or animals: each species usually had its own particular name. He insisted that originally, prior to contact with Western peoples, the Inupiat viewed only the spruce as trees. He also introduced the term *niqsaq* which was a major classifier of animals to him. The term is now in the most prominent Inupiaq-English dictionary, largely because one of the dictionary authors heard our joint paper at a meeting of the Alaska Anthropological Association. Its meaning, however, is listed as "sea mammal," which is not correct as explained by Ernie in the essay.

Another purpose of the paper was for readers to reflect on the arbitrariness of whatever classification system of anything they adhere to. Much inter-cultural conflict and misunderstanding is due to different emphasis given to attributes of phenomena that result in different classification systems. It is through a culture's system of classification (cognition) that a person in the culture experiences (perceives) the world. Think, for example, of these important classification terms from our own culture: democracy, human rights, religion, cult, nature, myth. These classifications are all to some degree based on arbitrary and culturally perceived attributes. Yet most English speakers treat them as absolutely correct kinds of classifications.

Kerry Feldman
Anthropology

Five minutes can be a very long time to contemplate something that conflicts deeply with how you understand the world. This essay describes what it was like for one of us to play the believing game with the Inupiaq way of classifying plants and animals. The lesson she learned is how deeply embedded her own world view is and how much is at stake when students confront worldviews not their own.

The Five Minute Rule

Dr. Kerri Morris

*Associate Professor of English
University of Alaska Anchorage*

The most profound moment for me during the entire intensive was Phyllis Fast's presentation of the Five Minute Rule, a technique that asks participants to consider an idea or argument for five minutes and to play a believing game with it. We were supposed to embrace the notion as if it were true, avoid criticizing it, put aside the analytical, and instead give into acceptance.

Phyllis presented us with an Inupiaq heuristic for animal and plant life. A beluga whale swimming in the ocean belongs to the category *sisuaq* while a beluga that has been taken by traditional methods becomes *niqsaq*. The latter category illustrates the role of functionality and subjectivity in Inupiaq culture. The hunting technique used to harvest it is integral to the animal's classification. The Feldman/Norton article emphasizes the deeply cultural role of linguistics in the classification process, contrasting it with Western biological classifications.

We were then asked to play the believing game for five minutes with this classification system. For me, five minutes was a long time to believe this approach to classification, if by believe we mean to truly embrace the idea and weave it into our world view. I am a rhetorician, with a deep background in the analytical philosophical tradition that is at the foundation of modern scientific thinking. I teach writing, specifically of arguments, a tradition steeped in Aristotle, the great classifier. Aristotle spent a significant part of his intellectual career building structures that could classify his world. He offered heuristics for knowledge, for plants and animals, for types of persuasion. For me as a rhetorician, the Aristotelian attitude toward classification is crucial.

Perhaps not surprisingly, I found the Five Minute Rule threatening. As I looked across the silent room, I didn't see the same struggle in the other members of my cohort and when it came time for discussion, my colleagues readily and cheerfully offered their insights about embracing this life-form classification. I, however, struggled with it, and, ultimately refused to accept it, even for five minutes. In answer to what was interesting or helpful, I had plenty to say. The notion of classifying an animal with reference to its role in human enterprises, specifically with regard to the hunter's allegiance to an honorable hunting method, is fascinating, even if subjective. It seemed clear to me that numerous features of this system were waiting to be noticed.

However, when it came to the question about what would be different if I believed the view, I found the five minutes overwhelming. This method of classification would and does completely undermine the principles that inform Western classification methods. The analytical tradition rejects the subjective. We might even say that the ability to separate the subjective is the West's most significant contribution to the intellectual tradition. Thus, this classification system would undermine my tradition and destroy my ability to teach argument.

For me, an academic who has always valued the intellectual and rational above all, the Five Minute Rule felt threatening. Perhaps this response reveals my lack of imagination or incompetence with regard to acceptance. Certainly it revealed the resistance I offer to the world. But later, when I reflected on it, I found a great deal to think about as well.

First, I'd been complaining all year about our graduate students in the English department. They seemed resistant to, perhaps even incapable of, reading an article or essay and working to understand it before starting to refute and deny it. They would lead with denial, even against the clear background of their own ignorance. I had struggled to convince them that they must first understand before they can rebut, judge, and assess. And yet I found it very difficult to do the same thing myself.

Second, I started to understand why students in my writing classes might be struggling with the concepts of critical thinking and argument. Many of them are not from the white, Western, analytic tradition. The intellectual processes I expect them to employ are based on values they may not understand, values that may threaten or undermine their more spiritual and subjective world views. The choice of coming to college has exposed some of them to an onslaught of threats to their cultural traditions. My traditions may be part of their difficulties.

I suppose I became conscious that there's more at stake in my teaching than I realized. I also developed a greater sense of empathy toward my students' struggles with (or against) new ideas. The Five Minute Rule gives me another option beyond mastery and acceptance to offer to students. I can invite them to temporarily put aside their own beliefs, to believe for a moment in a world different from their own. The technique demonstrates that when teacher and students meet in a classroom, we come from a variety of worlds. In order to learn, we must be willing to be open—if only for a few minutes—to that which challenges us. The Five Minute Rule doesn't ask us to abandon our own views, to transform our lives. It asks only that we set aside time to step outside of the familiar and into the larger world beyond. The exercise is good for us. And that includes me.



The Five Minute Rule can be combined with a common reading to explore new perspectives. See pages 130-132 for one example.

Whenever we present the Five Minute Rule, someone always asks “What happens if someone brings up a truly offensive perspective, and I don’t want to treat it as worthy of respect?” For example, what if someone wants to argue that the Ku Klux Klan was just performing necessary work, or that the Holocaust never happened? In my opinion, this is where the authority of the faculty member comes into play. He or she has the authority and the responsibility for setting boundaries in the classroom for the benefit of the whole.

Faculty members can say, “No. In my class we are not going to entertain the viewpoint that the Holocaust never happened, not even for five minutes. There is overwhelming evidence to the contrary, and we have a moral obligation to the people whose lives have been forever impacted by this event not to play games with that evidence. Certain things are non-negotiable in my classroom, and this is one of them.”

Or they can say, “I am unprepared to take on this discussion. I don’t have the skills or experience to ensure that it will result in productive learning, so I decide not to entertain this for now. I will instead seek out additional help so I am more prepared next time this arises.”

Others might say, “Why not? Let’s have the discussion. A primary role of academia is to entertain ideas, let them see the light of day, and model how critical thinking and the requirement of evidence can move people toward more responsible positions.” From this point of view, the ideas that we refuse to entertain are more dangerous than the ones that we do talk about. We might seize this opportunity to launch into a truly meaningful discussion of the role of evidence in academic and civic life, helping students to differentiate between opinion and historical or scientific fact. We might delve deeply into the phenomena of denial or of racism or anti-Semitism, helping our students grapple with some of the hardest questions faced by human society. We might examine the many, many times throughout history when real human experiences or facts have been “disappeared” by political leaders or governments.

These are questions we all have to wrestle with on our own. What harm comes if we take on these conflicts unprepared? Potentially quite a lot, if, for example, you have students whose parents or grandparents were actual victims of the Holocaust or who have their own experiences of the Klan. What harm comes if we fail to take these issues on at all? Perhaps even more, as we continue to turn out generations of students who don’t know how to grapple with the most important issues of our times.

If we’re going to go there, we’d better be prepared. Unfortunately, many of us aren’t. This project took us a few steps closer, but we’ve got a long way to go before we are really able to take on these potentially explosive kinds of dynamics in truly productive ways. I hope we keep moving in that direction. A lot depends upon it.

Libby Roderick
Center for Advancing Faculty Excellence

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

Culturally responsive teaching asks us to recognize that many of our default teaching methods are ineffective for large numbers of learners, to adapt our strategies to reach the greatest number, and to confront the power differentials that privilege some voices while discouraging or silencing others. This essay acknowledges both the complexity and importance of culturally responsive teaching while offering several tips for making our classrooms more inclusive of different types of learners.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Libby Roderick

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As many researchers and educators have noted, most educators in the U.S., without consciously intending to, have inherited and tend to reflexively reproduce models of learning based upon educational systems historically designed for only a few groups of learners: middle class or wealthy, able-bodied, young, heterosexual, European or European-American Christian men. The buildings, curricula, teaching styles, books, technology, and definitions of knowledge and learning that most of us were raised and are most comfortable with derive from these systems. “Many of us who now teach grew up in what appeared to be mono-cultural schools and communities. It is likely that we were socialized in our formative years with an unexamined set of traditions and beliefs about ourselves and a limited knowledge about others.”¹

Most of us have internalized the prevailing values of the dominant culture and consider them to be reflections of reality rather than a particular cultural perspective. As one example, sociologist Robin Williams, Jr. compiled a list of fifteen values that the dominant culture holds, including efficiency, practicality, activity, work, material comfort, progress, individual freedom, science, and secular rationality.²

Yet many of us are also uncomfortable perpetuating systems that fail to recognize and make welcome the vast range of learners, learning styles, ways of knowing, socioeconomic, and cultural perspectives that now fill our classrooms. We recognize that even as our society becomes increasingly diverse, it also continues to perpetuate unequal power relations between and among various groups. We do not wish to recreate these unequal relationships within our own classrooms. We believe that education plays a critical role—if not the critical role—in how we envision ourselves as citizens and members of the human community and whether we make significant movement toward our democratic ideals. We agree with

Most of us have internalized the prevailing values of the dominant culture and consider them to be reflections of reality rather than a particular cultural perspective.

¹ Bowser and Hunt, 1981.

² Williams, Jr., 1970, pp. 454-500

educator, activist and theorist Paulo Freire, who asserts that education is never politically neutral; no matter how and what we choose to teach, we are always either reproducing the inequities embedded in the larger society or challenging them in some way.

The effort to help more faculty members become more responsive to the various learners in their classrooms is, therefore, hugely important in our efforts to better tackle difficult dialogues on our campuses: dialogues that are often difficult precisely because they are attempting to address issues of power and inequity. I consider every communication a cross-cultural communication, and every classroom a microcosm of the greater society. Even when a classroom appears to be

I consider every communication a cross-cultural communication, and every classroom a microcosm of the greater society.



For more on Paulo Freire and the politics of language and education, see pages 188-193

homogenous, there are often many hidden differences. We come from different backgrounds, with different values, histories, perspectives, symbols, learning styles, and priorities. We may have similar skin colors, but radically different religious ideologies. I may be affected by a learning disorder you can't see, while you may have a disabled child at home who requires most of your attention. I may be female, while you are male, straight while you are gay, poor while you are middle class, Catholic while you are Jewish. Or I may simply learn more effectively through visual presentations while you absorb information most quickly when you are allowed to tackle something hands-on. All of these differences inform and complicate our efforts to communicate with one another.

Some of these differences may be relatively innocuous when it comes to how we teach, but others are profound. Culturally responsive teaching asks us to do at least

two things. First, to adapt our teaching styles to best reach the greatest number of learners and “allow the integrity of every learner to be sustained while each person attains relevant educational success and mobility.”³ And second, to recognize and do our best to correct for power differentials in the classroom that may promote some voices while silencing or suppressing others.

Trying to learn the specifics of every thread of American society is a daunting and seemingly overwhelming task, given the already challenging workloads faculty members handle. Fortunately, there are some things we can do that make the classroom more inclusive for all types of students and learners. Here are just a few:

● **Vary our teaching techniques.** In addition to lectures and tests, consider using strategies that facilitate inclusive learning, such as small-group work, dyad and triad sharing, problem-solving approaches, short reflective papers, role playing, using creative or performing arts as discussion starters, journals, research in the community, debates, or any number of the techniques discussed in the Brookfield and Preskill text (some of which are described in this handbook).

³ Wlodkowski and Ginsberg, 1995, p. xii

- **Permit multiple ways for learners to show that they have mastered the material.** In addition to papers and tests, offer students the option of demonstrating that learning has occurred through such efforts as writing and performing skits, creating Web sites or videos, conducting interviews, writing grant proposals, creating pieces of artwork or music, or giving oral reports.
- **Help students make links between the material and their own lives.** Invite students to make these connections in problem-solving exercises, classroom discussions, dyads and triads, writing assignments, or any of the other means described above. Doing so will allow them to bring in elements of their own socio-cultural backgrounds that the instructor might not be aware of. Ask questions to elicit these connections: What do we want to know about this subject? How is it important in our daily lives?
- **Use fair and clear criteria of evaluation.** Because learners are diverse, it is important to give them a chance to ask questions to ensure that they truly understand how assessment will take place and how to measure their progress. “Make available examples of concrete learning outcomes that have already been evaluated (e.g. past tests, papers, projects and media).”⁴
- **Use inclusive language and examples.** Invite students to break into dyads (groups of two) and identify words that generate feelings of anger or self-consciousness. Ask them to consider why these words affect them and to suggest alternative words or phrases that would be more amenable. Share these in the large group and list out the best ideas for class language. Frequently invite students to offer examples from their own lives to illustrate points made in classroom discussion; this practice can correct for any cultural biases in the instructor’s choice of examples and enrich discussion.
- **Invite students to point out behaviors, practices, and policies that discriminate.** This can best be done in anonymous short writing opportunities or an area of Blackboard (or other electronic classroom space) designated for requests, where a sample posting might read “Please don’t use the phrase ‘those people’ when referring to another group. Thanks!”

⁴ Wlodkowski and Ginsberg, 1995, p. 127-8

DIFFICULT DIALOGUE FITTING EVERYTHING IN

Process vs. Content

Whenever we introduce cultural awareness exercises in our faculty intensives, there are those who feel that we are wasting their time. They will never be teaching this content, and they don't have time for this process in their classrooms (or even in the intensive). The Circle of Objects in particular takes a lot of class time; even those who loved it were surprised and a little chagrined by how much time it can take and how much emotion often surfaces.

Academic culture, of course, values content delivery very highly; this is what students come to us for and what we get paid to do. For a few people this concern was paramount: how to stay productive, cover their content, fit in all the required information in sixteen short weeks. And they are right; there is a high cost for practicing strategies like the ones suggested in this chapter. Student and department evaluations may reflect discontent with covering less information or with introducing uncomfortable subjects or exercises. Our faculty rewards systems may not support it.

But there's also a high cost—for society as well as for academia—to not spending the time to create inclusive learning environments or examine how we learn as well as what we learn. Considerable research on effective teaching and learning shows that traditional content delivery strategies that focus exclusively on the transfer of information, view students as passive recipients of knowledge, and require them to work in isolation and in competition with one another are not the best way for most of our students to learn, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. People also learn from each other, and from their relationships with each other.

More important, perhaps, is the recognition that we teach as much by what we do and value and prioritize in the learning environments we create as by the information we impart. Our students may come away with a head full of facts about chemistry or economics, often quickly lost after the test, but they may also have learned a more enduring lesson: that no one cares about them as individuals. Or that correct data and a good grade matter more than any relevance their learning may have to their own lives and the real struggles and problems faced by the human community. Or that efficiency and a fast pace are more important than taking the time to dig deeply into key issues or build trusting relationships. Or that what matters most is the ability to out-argue others, rather than to really listen in an effort to try and understand one another. Or that no one seems equipped to deal with tough topics, and so they never get dealt with. These less visible lessons can then translate into greater challenges in our civic society: the kinds of challenges the *Difficult Dialogues* initiative was designed to address.

The idea of introducing new kinds of inclusive processes (like those explored in our intensives) and taking the time to tackle difficult dialogues in our classrooms inevitably brings up the question of how to fit them into a curriculum and a semester already overloaded with necessary content. Most faculty feel compelled, by choice or by departmental requirements, to cover a certain well-defined body of information and knowledge in the number of weeks allotted for their class. They will probably be evaluated on how well they have accomplished this goal.

Several of our participants expressed the concern that they wouldn't be able to cover all the necessary information if they made these changes, even if these practices would strengthen their classroom learning environment. This is one of those difficult areas where the best learning theory clashes with institutional requirements. Over and over, learning research demonstrates that if we want to develop students and citizens with a capacity to learn we need to help them develop connections between the course material, each other, and the real issues in their personal and civic lives. We also need to help them learn how to interact, think critically, express themselves, relate with others, address controversial topics, engage in civic discourse, conduct research, find credible sources of information, and many other things.

In short, we need to teach them, by modeling it, the process of learning. This endeavor requires us to be both selective and realistic about which specific pieces of information they actually need to know. If we are successful at teaching them the process, they are likely to become lifelong learners: people who remain enthusiastic about learning, who will be motivated to search for and competent in finding relevant information whenever they need it, and who are able to apply that learning to real-life challenges.

Viewed in this light, taking the time to do the work encompassed in our *Difficult Dialogues* project does not hinder student learning and our academic objectives; rather, it strengthens both.

START TALKING

Questions for Discussion:

What do I know about my students' gender, racial, cultural, or class identities, and where have I learned these things?

How does my own gender, racial, cultural, or class identity affect how I teach?

How does my students' gender, racial, cultural, and/or class identity affect how they learn?

Can I—or should I—protect my students from offensive ideas or comments?

Science, Religion

***It is the mark of an educated
mind to be able to entertain a
thought without accepting it.***

Aristotle

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FACULTY INTENSIVE

Day Four

We saved Thursday for one of the most difficult topics of them all: religion. Unlike many campuses in the contiguous states, Alaska universities do not include large, visible student populations with religious backgrounds other than Christian. But like many other campuses, we've been struggling with how to work well with our evangelical or fundamentalist Christian students. How do we respect their religious identities and convictions while simultaneously honoring our academic responsibilities to prompt students to see their set of values as one possibility among others and to critically evaluate the assumptions that underlie their world views?

We tried a variety of approaches in our faculty intensives. In one, we introduced a song with lyrics that challenged strict interpretations of the Jesus story, pairing it with an exercise called the Cocktail Party, in which people mingled as if at a social event, having a series of conversations about their responses to the song. In another, we showed a DVD from Portland Community College's Illumination Project (also sponsored by the *Difficult Dialogues* initiative) which uses a strategy called the Theatre of the Oppressed to explore religious issues on campus. The technique consists of a performance in which students and other audience members act out various scenarios in alternate ways to explore the potential for achieving different endings. We did our own version with a role-playing exercise to help participants practice responding when religion surfaces in the classroom.

We also had a few traditional lectures. Greg Kimura, president of the Alaska Humanities Forum, presented some theological arguments to refute the myth that religion and reason are in irreconcilable conflict. Religion instructor Kristin Helweg Hanson gave a presentation on faith-based developmental theory that explained what's at stake with regard to religious identity in the classroom (how some religions require their members to witness, for example). She gave a second presentation on teaching to the whole student that explored student needs for finding meaning and purpose in life in addition to intellectual skill-building. For the third intensive, English Professor Toby Widdicombe shared strategies for using our Books of the Year to explore themes of religion and politics in the classroom.

Also during the third intensive, we held a panel discussion on religion in the classroom featuring APU Professor of Marine Biology Leslie Cornick, UAA Professor of Physics and Astronomy Travis Rector, and APU Professor of Religious Studies Regina Boisclair. This panel extended a conversation begun in a previous faculty workshop led by Leslie, Travis, and UAA English Professor Daniel Kline. As it happened, the panel discussion triggered one of the liveliest dialogues of the whole year-long project.

Sample Agenda

- Exercise: Role Playing
- Discussion: Books of the Year
- Exercise: Cocktail Party
- Presentation: Theological Arguments for Staying in the Conversation
- Panel Discussion: Religion in the Classroom

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

Role Playing

Say, for instance, you're a science professor. You're teaching your class, covering your content, talking about evolution or the physical age of the earth or the vastnesses of space and time. Suddenly one of your students erupts. In response to the scientific content of your class, the student stands up, calls you "the devil's own messenger" and begins witnessing about religion. How do you handle this? What do you do?

Because something similar had happened to one of our participants, we used this scenario in one of our faculty intensives as the basis of a role-playing exercise. The idea is to take a basic story, something that has happened to one or more of those present, and replay it in multiple ways with different people acting out alternate endings. In the spirit of the theater, this exercise creates a rehearsal space. The person who presents the story gets to be the director, while others act out the roles of professor and student(s). As the actors play out alternate endings, the whole group gets to see and consider a multitude of possible responses. As they watch others wrestle with uncomfortable situations, participants can clearly see how hard these kinds of teaching challenges are for their colleagues as well. In a situation with no single right answer, we come to realize that we are all in it together.

We've found role-playing to be an effective exercise. It works even though nobody has a definitive answer. It works because it's a practice. Through repetition, the sting goes out; through alternate responses, you have a real chance of discovering a strategy that will work for you; through practice, you have a better chance of responding more productively the next time you find yourself in a similar situation.



This exercise creates a practice space for trying out alternate potential endings to classroom incidents.

Scripting

Choose an incident that happened to one of you or define a scenario that is substantially similar to something several of you have experienced. Specify how many players are involved.

Casting

The faculty member who has experienced the situation acts as director, with others taking the roles of faculty member, students, or other necessary players in the scene.

Staging

On the first run-through, try to act the scene exactly as it happened – unsatisfactory ending and all. Then do it again, but this time, the player acting as faculty member can improvise a different response and see how that plays out. Repeat several times, with other players stepping into the roles and improvising alternate endings.

Critiquing

After the last run-through, engage in a group critique of the various strategies and outcomes.

The role-playing exercise was the most helpful technique of the week for me. It was useful to hear how the original instructor handled the situation and to see how others chose to facilitate it. This was the most like situations I deal with, where the topic at hand is not necessarily controversial to me, and thus the direction the students take it in, or the charged nature of it for some students, takes me by surprise. How to handle those situations is exactly what I was hoping to come away with.

Tracey Burke

Social Work

Books of the Year

For the second year of our program, we chose two Books of the Year that provide nuanced perspectives of religious extremism: *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood and *The Swallows of Kabul* by Yasmina Khadra. Both are works of fiction. Both explore a kind of fundamentalism (one Christian, the other Islamic) and its effects on human relationships. One is by a female author, the other a male author (writing under a female pseudonym). One's writing style is relatively spare, the other lush (translated from the French). Both books are short and accessible to students from many backgrounds.

These two books invite dialogue around certain related themes:

- The impacts of religious fundamentalism
- The types of love between couples
- The power of crowd behavior
- Power relationships (between men and women, between women and women, and between men and men)
- Environmental collapse and response

We selected these themes to complement a large-scale community education project called *Engaging Muslims: Religion, Cultures, Politics* that also ran throughout the year. The APU-sponsored series brought four nationally prominent Islamic scholars to Anchorage for a series of lectures and workshops.

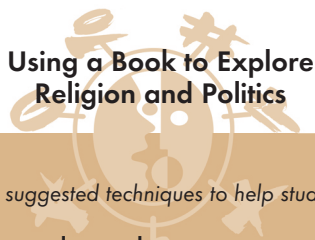
BOOKS OF THE YEAR 2007-08

The Handmaid's Tale — Margaret Atwood

This modern classic tells the story of Offred, a Handmaid in the republic of Gilead, who has become a slave for her ovaries in a dystopia where fertility is declining and politics and religion have become powerfully intertwined. Offred can remember a time when things were different, when women had families and jobs of their own, and access to knowledge and literature as well.

The Swallows of Kabul — Yasmina Khadra

This chilling novel tells a story of two couples living in Afghanistan under Taliban rule. Mohsen and Zunaira are survivors of Afghanistan's educated middle class; Atiq and Musarrat are a jailor and his dying wife. The public stoning of a condemned prostitute sets these four people on new paths in a world awash with extremes of both fanaticism and tenderness.



Using a Book to Explore Religion and Politics

A few suggested techniques to help students explore issues in a common reading.

Discover relevant themes

Ask students to identify themes in the book relevant to your course. Have them provide an example (with a quote and page number) that illustrates each theme, and discuss parallels in modern American culture and society.

Pair it with a film

Show a film on a related subject or pair it with a film version of the book itself. Ask students to look for differences and to notice the effects of those choices on the original themes.

Pair it with the Five Minute Rule

Ask students to imagine the worldview represented or held by characters in the book. Under what conditions might this perspective be true? What would be different if it were true? What is interesting, helpful, intriguing about this view?

A novel in a science class? It only seems like a contradiction. *The Handmaid's Tale* explores themes of biology, psychology, ecology, and sociology, to name just a few of the sciences represented. This essay describes some simple assignments that link readings from the book to the content of a social science seminar on gender. As the students discovered parallels to the world around them, the professor rediscovered the book's place in her own past.

Using *The Handmaid's Tale* in a Social Science Seminar on Gender

Dr. Claudia Lampman

Professor of Psychology

University of Alaska Anchorage

Last spring, I found out that a course I was scheduled to teach the following fall had been misprinted in the schedule. Instead of the new seminar I was planning on Positive Psychology, I was listed as teaching a course on the Nature and Nurture of Gender. I love the Gender course and have taught it many times, but I was also ready for something new. As I was trying to decide whether to post fliers about the change of title or just do the gender course again, I learned something great. The Books of the Year picks were out, and one of them was *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood. In a split second I made the decision to stick with my gender class—it was an opportunity to include a book that had made a huge impression on my own life twenty years earlier. What luck.

I discovered *The Handmaid's Tale* following my first year of graduate school in social psychology. It was a bit of beach reading (back when we still baked our bodies). Around the same time, I read John Irving's *The Cider House Rules*, and I think both books played a role in my budding interest in the psychology of gender and sexuality—the very things I teach and research today. Atwood's book fascinated me and scared me, and I thought of it often during the coming years as I struggled with infertility. As a psychologist, I am fascinated by how absolutely critical fertility (or lack of it), pregnancy, and motherhood (or the choice to remain child free) are to a woman's self-concept and the things people believe about her based on the choices she makes. Fertility is something women take for granted in our youth, spend years trying to suppress, long for when we can't conceive on cue, and at some point have to say goodbye to.

The Handmaid's Tale shows us that a woman's fertility does not ever really belong to just her—that this miraculous piece of nature is not just about an individual woman's decision or fate to mother or not. It is always, always a cultural, political, religious, and physical event that signals the health of a woman and the society in which she lives. When we see a pregnant woman, our reactions to her are quite different depending on her age, race, social class, and marital status. Complete strangers came up and touched my pregnant belly, but I was a middle-class white woman wearing a wedding ring. How many express the same type of public joy for a pregnant teen pushing a baby stroller?

My class on gender is an interdisciplinary social science course, heavy on the science. The field of gender is changing very rapidly, and texts on the psychology of gender now contain chapters on the biology and evolution of gender-based traits and behaviors. My students read about research on PET scans, MRIs, and the sexual behaviors of rodents and primates. We spend weeks discussing sex differences in the brain, hormones, and innate cognitive and social abilities and traits. Although I

gave my students pretty standard assignments to go along with their reading of a novel, the reading of a novel is definitely not a standard assignment in a class like this one. It will be from now on.

I gave the class four weeks to read the book, postponing any discussion until everyone had finished it. The first assignment, about a month into the course, was to identify five gender-related themes in the book, provide an example (with a quote and page number) that illustrates each theme, and discuss parallels in modern American culture and society.

Here's what one student wrote:

The book never cites one specific reason for the decline in births. "The reasons for this decline are not altogether clear to us. Some of the failure to reproduce can undoubtedly be traced back to the widespread availability of birth control of various kinds, including abortion, in the immediate pre-Gilead period." (Atwood, p. 304) The book takes aim that birth control and abortion are possible reasons for continuing low birth rates. Although no scientific explanation is given

as to why birth control is thought to be to blame for dwindling birth rates, this blame assessment is one that is paralleled in current American culture. Past abortions leading to higher breast cancer risk and infertility is a topic that is being battled back and forth in the media. Pro-life groups assert a link between abortion and infertility. Pro-choice groups assert that abortion is safer than childbirth and that the pro-life claims are scare tactics (The Guttmacher Institute). The debate between family planning and increased fertility risk is one that is currently being fought in America.

The discussions were fantastic, and we were able to connect their reading to other things they'd been learning about in class.

In a second assignment, students watched the film version of *The Handmaid's Tale* and wrote a paper comparing the film and book. My goal was

to have them speculate about why various changes were made and discuss whether or not gender played a role in the differences cited.

Here's what one student wrote:

In the book there is an emphasis on how modest the dresses of the handmaids were. We are left to imagine the garments as being heavy and formless. However, the garments in the movie are not as modest and cumbersome as those described in the book. There is also more of an emphasis on sexuality and nudity in the film. In one scene of the film, Offred is in the window naked and Nick sees her. The use of nudity reveals the need to have such scenes in a film to attract moviegoers. If the nudity of the female body is needed in order to attract members of our society to watch a film, it leads one to question if indeed our own society is that much different. Atwood portrays women of Gilead as solely being defined by their bodies. The use of the female physique in television and movies objectifies a woman's body, causing her to be defined by her body. The pressure from the media to be thin and beautiful surrounds the women of today and yet we believe we are free to be individuals.

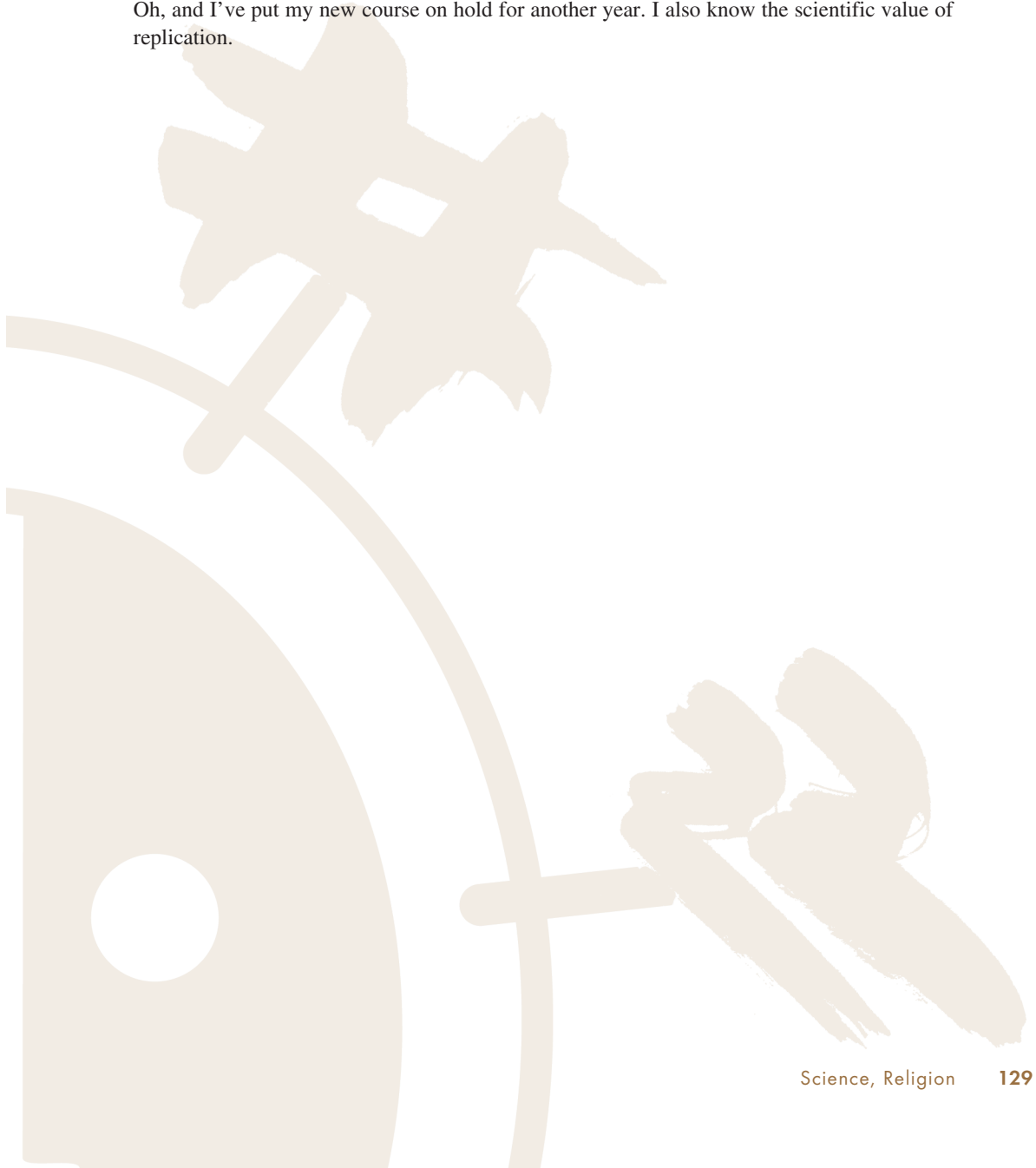
As this is a seminar, students are expected to contribute to class discussion each week. The discussions were fantastic, and we were able to connect their reading to other things they'd been learning about in class. They spoke about how women in the novel were supposed to be asexual (or at least forced to act that way), while men's sexuality was powerful, dangerous, and in need of control. They connected this theme to our class discussions about the evolution of sex differences in mate preferences, the causes and consequences of sexual assault, and sex differences in promiscuity,

infidelity, and sexual double standards. Several found the novel to be prophetic, noticing that infertility has in fact increased, major environmental disasters are happening or on their way, religious fundamentalism has infiltrated politics and government, and attitudes about abortion divide the nation.

When I asked them if they liked the assignments, I received enthusiastic thumbs up. They especially liked looking for modern parallels. They connected dots between issues and theories in the class and themes in the novel. They saw how a work of fiction can do so much more than entertain us. In fact, I think my students got as much out of reading it as I did twenty years ago.

Do I think a novel belongs in a science class? Absolutely I do. Coloring outside the lines is good. Today I am a mother, a wife, a professor—all roles that I cherish. I thank Margaret Atwood for helping to point me in at least one of those directions. I even had fun writing this essay because it did not need to be scientific. Yes, I consider this a very successful experiment.

Oh, and I've put my new course on hold for another year. I also know the scientific value of replication.



An online discussion of *The Handmaid's Tale* nearly took a dangerous turn when a student forcibly resisted the Five Minute Rule and its injunction to consider for even five minutes the “left-wing horseshit” in an assignment from a “biased” instructor. This essay explores the assignment, the instructor’s response, and the links between faculty development and the ability to turn startling or even frightening moments into teaching moments.

Responding to a Class Crisis

Joy C. Mapaye

*Assistant Professor of Journalism and Public Communications
University of Alaska Anchorage*

We all brace ourselves for that moment when a student says something so offensive or shocking that the class goes silent. It is a moment we dread in our minds—as we are stunned and unable to find the words or actions to deal with the situation. I expected that moment to happen in one of my large lecture classes. Instead, it happened in my online course.

I assigned *The Handmaid's Tale* in my freshman-level Media and Society class and created an assignment based on the Five Minute Rule. The goal was to help students think critically about diverse perspectives. *The Handmaid's Tale* was a great vehicle for this discussion in that it illustrated the danger of imposing a dominant worldview on others, while using fear to enforce formal rules of conduct. To facilitate discussion, I created a PDF of five pages from the book. Through this introduction, I hoped students would read the entire book later on.

I posted the assignment on the group discussion board area, explained the rules, and posed a few prompting questions:

Please read pp. 173-177. For this discussion we will use something called the Five Minute Rule. It begins with imagining life the way the author describes it in the book. For five minutes, imagine the world the author describes. Suspend disbelief. You are living life in this world.

Now answer one or more of the following questions in your group.

- *In what sense or under what conditions might this be true?*
- *What would be different if you believed this view and accepted it as true?*
- *What is interesting, helpful, or intriguing about this view?*

The first three groups generated some of the most thoughtful discussions I’ve ever had in my online course. I was excited that both techniques together had resulted in such dialogue. The following examples are excerpts of student comments:

- *“When I first read the excerpt, I assumed that it was yet another creepy post-9/11 tale like the popular 2005 film *V For Vendetta*. As I reflected and did a little research, I was surprised to discover that Margaret Atwood wrote her feminist critique way back in the mid-1980s. Her prescient theme of an over-reaching government bent on dismantling civil liberties really resonated with me.”*

- *“Wow, I must say I shivered when I read those pages (and I wanted to keep reading and find out more).”*
- *“Handmaid’s muzzled, then suppressed, press resonated for me with the strident verbal attacks by government officials against any media channel or prominent person that dared question the shaky rationales for the invasion of Iraq (“You’re either with us or against us”).”*
- *“It’s intriguing to imagine this kind of world ... these few pages seem to hold some truth, interestingly enough, in our own world ...”*

My excitement quickly faded, however, when I read a post from the fourth group. The subject line read “Nothing more than Left-Wing Horseshit.” The student called it “fantastical” to imagine living in this “left-wing propagandic concoction” for even five minutes. He claimed the very question reveals the teacher’s “strong left-wing bias,” and admitted to a “nasty tendency to get angry” when “left-wing bullshit” is shoved down his throat. There was much more along these lines, along with a fair amount of profanity.

My heart fell. I felt a huge lump in my throat. Prior to the intensive, I don’t think I would have known what to do. As educators, we are rarely given training on how to handle such crises in the classroom. I would have felt paralyzed. Instead, I took a few minutes to collect my thoughts, and then I considered how to turn this posting into a teaching moment. I knew the other students had already read the post. I knew they were waiting for me to respond.

In my reply, I told the student I appreciated his thoughts and respected his point of view. I focused on his assumption that journalism professors and others in the media are so-called “left-wing,” and told the class we would consider that as our “question of the week” topic the next week. As a reporter myself, I told a story about the deadline pressures and technical glitches that can sometimes interfere with the presentation of the news. I used the example of President George W. Bush’s visit to Anchorage a couple years ago. My station had scheduled coverage of the president’s visit as the top story. However, right before the live shot, our satellite truck malfunctioned, and we could not broadcast the story. The producers were forced to cut to the next story, which unfortunately was about protesters. The protester story was not supposed to be first, but because of technical difficulties it ended up as the top story of the newscast. The station received hundreds of emails and phone calls about our “bias.”

I asked the angry poster to refrain from using inappropriate language in the discussion board, reminded him about our class code of conduct, and encouraged him to present his point of view in accordance with those guidelines.

I reminded the class of the reasons for the assignment. It was meant to encourage critical thinking and allow students to discuss difficult and often controversial topics in an atmosphere of respect. I asked the angry poster to refrain from using inappropriate language in the discussion board, reminded him about our class code of conduct, and encouraged him to present his point of view in accordance with those guidelines. Finally, I told him I valued his voice in the discussion and invited him to e-mail me if he had any further concerns.

After I posted my response, I realized this teaching moment was also a learning moment for me as well. I felt empowered by the technique. I learned to calmly and logically respond. I also felt lucky the situation happened in my online course, where I had some time to devise an answer.

Responses from students

Student 1: Thank you for asking (student's name) to stop using profanity and other inappropriate language in his posts. You did it in an appropriate manner and, I thought, exercised remarkable restraint. I have taken telecourses as well as Web-based courses before, and I've never seen anything like this. I was pretty upset over his posts, and was ready to YELL at him about it, but then I said to myself "I'm not the professor, I'm a student. I cannot control him."

Student 2: After that posting, I didn't want anything to do with the discussion. I was actually thankful that it was online. I would have been very uncomfortable in the same room, especially after the Virginia Tech incident. A bit disconcerting to say the least, coming from an adult in an education environment. I admire the way it was handled in your discussion board response: direct yet respectful.

Later, the other students in the group thanked me for my reply. I had taken control of my class, re-established the rules, and provided a valuable teaching moment not found in the syllabus or book. The moment gave me courage to take on these types of challenges, both online and in traditional lecture classes.

As for the angry student, he did not reply directly to my posting. However, he did continue to participate in class discussions, including the next week's question on whether or not the media are biased. He also maintained respect for the class conduct rules for the remainder of the course. At the end of the semester, several students commented that overall they appreciated the conservative perspective he brought to the class. "He brought up some great points," said one. His contributions gave the class greater diversity of thought.

Cocktail Party

In our continuing effort to showcase as many different and potentially engaging techniques as possible, we decided to try out Brookfield and Preskill's Cocktail Party exercise as a vehicle for talking about religion. We also wanted to demonstrate the possibility of utilizing the performing/creative arts as a springboard for discussions on controversial topics. To save time, we combined the two approaches into a single exercise, with mixed results.

We began the exercise with a live performance of a song entitled "When Jesus Takes Me Dancing," which contains lyrics that can be interpreted in a multitude of ways, one of which involves a highly non-traditional view of the Christian Jesus. Kristin Helweg Hanson, who teaches courses on religion in UAA's Philosophy department, then introduced the cocktail party theme. She asked participants to pick up their desserts from lunch (which happened to be fruit cocktails), and mingle about the room in a simulation of an actual cocktail party.

Kristin opened the conversation by saying it was obvious "that the singer does not ascribe to traditional Christian beliefs." Then she asked participants to spend time in quick verbal exchanges with each other to find out how others responded to that statement. People were encouraged to exchange views rapidly, move on quickly, and keep in mind two questions to which they would be invited to respond at the close of the exercise:

- What did you hear from another person with a different viewpoint than your own which you found most persuasive?
- What did you hear from another person who shared your viewpoint that was most helpful to you in articulating your perspective on this question?



A discussion format that encourages participants to interact with each other as if in a salon or other social setting. Try this in the morning by creating a coffee shop setting if you prefer.

Treat it as a party.

Arrange the room as you would for a party. Create lots of open spaces and place chairs in conversational groupings of three to four students. Set up one or two tables with an array of nonalcoholic drinks, finger foods, or hors d'oeuvres, and appropriate napkins, plates, and glasses.

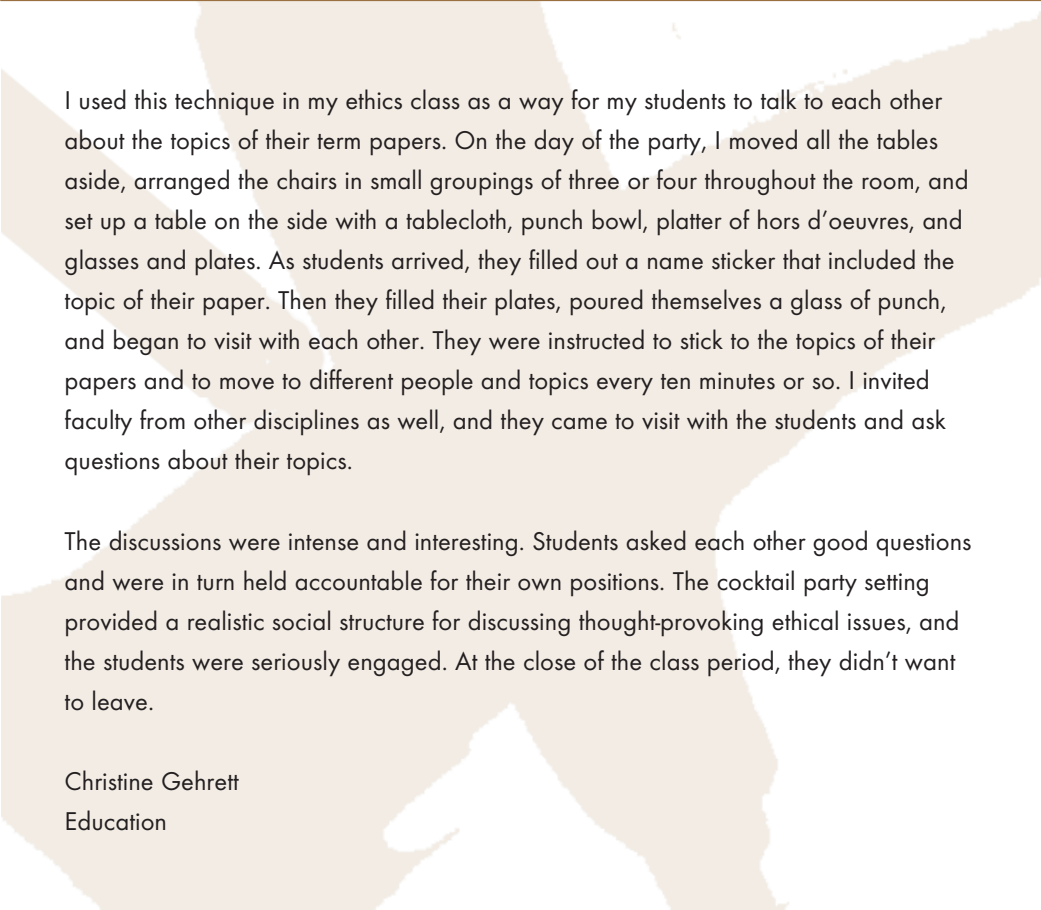
Expect your guests to talk about serious things.

Instruct your guests to talk about the topics or issues you want them to explore. Encourage them to mingle often and to engage with more than one group. Move through the room as host or hostess, modeling the very conversations you are encouraging and introducing new topics or questions wherever appropriate.

*This technique was adapted from Brookfield and Preskill, *Discussion as a Way of Teaching**

As it happened, our participants did not find this exercise very interesting. They didn't disagree about the opening statement, nor did they mingle with each other as instructed, but instead engaged in extended conversations on unrelated topics. Later, we realized that we had underestimated their need to simply take a break from the intensity of the week's activities. They used the relaxed cocktail party atmosphere as an opportunity to chat about other topics rather than stick to the proposed agenda.

Although we didn't repeat this exercise in the following intensives, several of our participants were later able to use it quite effectively with students.



I used this technique in my ethics class as a way for my students to talk to each other about the topics of their term papers. On the day of the party, I moved all the tables aside, arranged the chairs in small groupings of three or four throughout the room, and set up a table on the side with a tablecloth, punch bowl, platter of hors d'oeuvres, and glasses and plates. As students arrived, they filled out a name sticker that included the topic of their paper. Then they filled their plates, poured themselves a glass of punch, and began to visit with each other. They were instructed to stick to the topics of their papers and to move to different people and topics every ten minutes or so. I invited faculty from other disciplines as well, and they came to visit with the students and ask questions about their topics.

The discussions were intense and interesting. Students asked each other good questions and were in turn held accountable for their own positions. The cocktail party setting provided a realistic social structure for discussing thought-provoking ethical issues, and the students were seriously engaged. At the close of the class period, they didn't want to leave.

Christine Gehrett
Education

STAYING IN THE CONVERSATION

People sometimes use their religious beliefs as the rationale for refusing to participate in important conversations, stressing the importance of faith over other ways of knowing. This essay explores some of the theological resources available within the Western monotheistic tradition that emphasize the fallibility of human knowledge and the value of free intellectual inquiry and respectful dialogue—values shared by the modern university. This theology may help professors engage their students in productive conversation without buying into an unnecessary dualism.

Theological Arguments for Staying In the Conversation

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*President/Chief Executive Officer
Alaska Humanities Forum*



GOD SAID IT. I BELIEVE IT. THAT SETTLES IT.

This bumper sticker emblemizes what many professors fear most in students: an aggressive, anti-intellectual, even cynical attitude that opposes the inquisitive ethos of the modern university. For many professors, such an attitude presents a dilemma, cutting off reasoned discussion and critical inquiry, creating a dualism, but not a dialectic. There appears to be no room for the exploration—let alone synthesis—of ideas that is so basic to the classroom.

The temptation for the professor is to avoid potentially controversial topics altogether. As Dr. Claudia Lampman’s UAA study shows (see page 18), this is unfortunately too often the case. But avoidance is no less harmful to the learning environment. It stifles the range of free classroom discourse that is the hallmark of a good university education. Avoidance, in effect, capitulates to the dualism.

On the other hand, few professors relish the idea of addressing a controversial topic like religion that they know will inflame their students or cause them to try to shut down the dialogue. This is philosopher Richard Rorty’s image of religion as a “conversation-stopper.” For many secular professors like Rorty, religion (or, at least, Western religion) is at odds with the modern/postmodern worldview. Their argument is that religion’s truth-claims and rationality oppose democratic discourse from the outset and shut down the possibility of conversation. Many follow Rorty’s advice, which is to exclude religion and the religious point of view from the classroom on these grounds.

There is, however, an alternative to the false dualism in which the religious worldview (specifically the monotheisms of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) is set against the university in a continual battle over discourse methods and truth-claims. It is instructive to recall that the modern university

is a product of Western religion and that the world's greatest universities, from Oxbridge to the Ivy League, continue this deep historical association with their religious heritage at the same time as they produce Nobel laureates. For most of the history of university education there was no presumed conflict between religion and reason, and in many of the best places there still isn't. Nevertheless, the myth that religion and reason are in irreconcilable conflict is perpetuated on all sides, including those self-identified religious students. They may not be aware how the theology of their own tradition demands a free, critical, and engaging rationality that is not only in line with the ethos of the modern university but also constitutive of it.

There is, however, an alternative to the false dualism in which the religious worldview (specifically the monotheisms of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) is set against the university in a continual battle over discourse methods and truth-claims.

would Maimonides and Avicenna, and also Karl Barth, the twentieth-century grandfather of today's evangelical thought. This is not a throwaway point. Even the fundamentalist with this bumper sticker, although he or she may not realize it, has already moved beyond literal truth to a figurative understanding of divinity and of how truth is communicated.

The assertion reveals another abstract theological notion that is basic to these religions' understanding: the absolute nature of God. According to this view, God is unique, absolute, and absolutely above and beyond all other observable or knowable things. God is so far above/beyond that human understanding cannot comprehend the vastness of the division. God is, to quote Anselm, "that than which nothing greater can be conceived." This means that a) God is wholly unlike anything else that exists; and b) God's understanding is absolutely beyond human understanding.

Stated another way, in the idiom of the bumper sticker, God is awesome. God's knowledge is perfect, while human understanding isn't. In this view, only God knows truth absolutely because, to borrow from Reza Aslan's best-selling book on Islam, only God is God. This is why in the monotheistic worldview God's truth always trumps human knowledge. This view of God leads to a peculiar view of what it means to be human as well: we are not only morally, but epistemologically, fallen, broken, and sinful.

The rest of this paper will seek to explain this theology in general terms in the hopes that professors not familiar with it may draw upon it in the classroom. If you understand the theology, you may be able to use it to refute the nonproductive dualism and to illustrate how faith, properly understood, demands free and critical discourse. My explanation will take the form of a deconstruction of the offending bumper sticker.

God said it.

A post-modern ironist might point out that this statement cannot be taken literally, as the God shared by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam does not actually have a mouth with which to speak those truths believers espouse. This observation, in fact, is nothing new. Augustine and Aquinas would agree, as

I believe it.

In Greek mythology, if human beings aspire to or claim for themselves a power or knowledge that is properly that of the gods, they commit acts of hubris. This never ends well, as, for example, in the story of Icarus, whose wings melted when he flew too close to the sun. In Jerusalem-based monotheisms, when humans claim a power or knowledge that is properly God's, they commit a sin: the sin of idolatry. Idolatry is in fact the principal sin, highlighted in the First Commandment, of placing something that is not God, i.e. oneself, in God's place. Claiming that one knows the mind of God on any matter (cf. 'God is pro-life', another popular bumper sticker) violates this commandment.

The prohibition against idolatry is not optional; it is fundamental to Western monotheism. Those who take faith seriously believe they will be judged by their fidelity to it. In evangelical Christian parlance, it is a matter of salvation.

The way to avoid idolatry is humility. Believers must be cautious about what they claim to know, intellectually or morally, because overconfidence can lead to pride, which is an aspirational attitude that encroaches upon God. Pride leads directly to hubris and idolatry. In the internal logic of belief, if we are sinful, broken, and fallible, how can we be proud of what we know (or, rather, claim to know), since it is so little compared to what God knows? The antidote combines a continuous moral self-inventory with a constant practice of the virtue of humility. This involves a thoroughgoing critical and self-critical rationality on the part of the believer.

That settles it.

If only God has absolute knowledge, and if we are not God, then the proper attitude of the believer toward truth requires a thoroughgoing fallibility (the view that our understanding might be wrong) and corrigibility (the possibility for improvement or correction). Corrigible does not imply perfectible, however, because perfection is an attribute of God.

In the monotheistic worldview, the truth of human understanding can never be settled; it always remains open to revision and correction. The Christian fundamentalist can see this occurring in a process of updated revelation, from Old Testament to New, from prophet to messiah, leading up to a future end-time that operates like a vanishing horizon. Likewise, the Talmud, a record of authoritative rabbinical discussions, interprets and inflects Tanak (the Hebrew scriptures). Islamic law and sharia, along with their various interpretations, update and concretize how Muslims should put the Five Pillars into practice. In all of these cases, God's truth may be settled, but human understanding and practice remain open as critical, discursive, and evolutionary processes.

There is a type of religious epistemology operating here that is akin to pragmatism and the method of science, religion's often reputed enemies. Because only God understands truth absolutely, human understanding is constantly in a process of correction. The entire religious community,

In the monotheistic worldview, the truth of human understanding can never be settled; it always remains open to revision and correction.

including authorities and fellow believers, is involved in this process. An example seen every day in dorm rooms and cafeterias on campus is the testing of individual interpretations in a bible study. Nonbelievers can unwittingly participate and even trump believers in this context. There are plenty of biblical examples where a pharaoh or tax collector or prostitute recognizes a religious truth when the purported faithful do not.

The upshot is that if nothing is ever ultimately settled in human understanding, the believer exists in a world of noetic change and must hold an attitude of epistemological openness to that change.

Other Strategies

Faithful believers, even if they think otherwise, actually believe the opposite of the bumper sticker. “God said it” cannot be taken literally, because it uses figurative language. The assertion “I believe it” cannot claim to know the mind of God, because that would be to commit idolatry. And “that settles it” in fact settles nothing; the believer must remain open to changes in human understanding because of the twin monotheistic notions of the absoluteness of God and the fallibility of human knowledge.

The core theological values of the believer are not only in sync with the values of free inquiry espoused by the modern university, they are in fact the origin of those values.

These theological arguments deriving from the monotheistic notion of divinity can be used to refute the dualistic tendency when it arises in class. But there is yet another, more personal argument that one can make to the obstreperous believer. I will call this the existential argument. In the creation account shared by the Western religious traditions, God saw that His creation was good. This judgment implies that each individual is created holy, with a soul that is unique, eternal, or perhaps both. Because of this, each individual is, or ought to be, worthy of respect, care, and love.

Yet too frequently the dualistic worldview expresses itself in an us-versus-them attitude that demonizes the other based on the notions they hold. This attitude is aggressively dehumanizing; it denies the personhood of the other that the God of this worldview has created and deemed good.

There is a powerful way to combat the tendency to marginalize and dehumanize those we don't agree with, and that is to appeal to the existential distinctiveness and infinite value of each person, exemplified by the Christian ethic to love your neighbour as yourself. If every person is worthy of love, they are certainly worthy of being treated with respect and dignity regardless of their position on any given issue that might come up in class.

Here again, the monotheistic tradition dictates an attitude of humility that goes beyond the neutrality of mere tolerance and all the way to active love. There is an existential openness to difference rooted in the core of what it means to be a believer. The attitude is not only intellectual. It flows from what philosopher and theologian Cornel West calls “the Christian tragic sense of life.”

For the Christian believer, there is awareness that the notion of human fallibility extends beyond knowledge to include our moral interactions with other people. The upshot is that believers need to be conscientious about this capacity, intended and unintended, to harm others, including in the easy

demonizing that occurs in the us-versus-them dichotomy. The love ethic breaks down this division from the believer's side—not by aggressive and combative behavior, but by putting the other before self.

Religion and the modern university

The core theological values of the believer are not only in sync with the values of free inquiry espoused by the modern university, they are in fact the origin of those values. From the medieval university to the Ivy League, many of our most prestigious institutions were originally founded to cultivate a learned clergy and laity. While there has always been a necessary tension in the search for truth between religious authority and university learning, there is no necessary antinomy, in spite of a mythology that has developed recently. The fact is that the Western monotheisms and the university classroom can thrive on this tension and learn from each other.

University professors have nothing to fear from the religious student. Rather than feel pressed to move away from religiously charged issues or debates in class, they owe both religious and secular students the opportunity to learn from their distinctive viewpoints, wherever those viewpoints appropriately impinge upon the subject matter of the particular class. This paper has endeavored to argue why this should be the case, and to provide professors with arguments found within the Western monotheistic intellectual tradition that may help those self-identified religious students see how their own tradition demands reasoned, respectful discourse.

FRAMING THE CONVERSATION

Panel Discussion and Dialogue

A biologist, a physicist, and a medievalist walk into a classroom, and...

No, it's not the setup for a joke; it was the setup for a faculty panel discussion on religion in the classroom held by three of our colleagues in the spring. The event was attended by a chemist, a jurist, a journalist, and a theologian among other interested individuals. As we went around the room introducing ourselves and saying why we were there, it became clear that religion comes up almost everywhere we turn.

"I get people in my Justice classes arguing that our laws should be based on God's law, not research," said the jurist. "I had a fundamentalist Christian and an ardent atheist square off in my Honors' class on Stephen Hawking," said the physicist. "I just don't have a good handle on how to address these issues," admitted a third, and other heads nodded around the room. Few of us really did.

The panelists shared a few things that had worked for them. The biologist described the evolution of her teaching practice from an avoidance of discussing creationism and intelligent design to a new willingness to engage. The physicist focused on separating scientific knowledge from religious belief through the medium of scientific practice. The medievalist came in late (he was dealing with a different difficult dialogue at the time), but made up for it with an approach he calls "owning up to the discipline."

The essays that follow are based on these three presentations.



Panel Discussion and Dialogue

A technique for presenting multiple viewpoints of expert panelists before opening a conversation to a larger audience.

Logistics

Recruit panelists with different experiences and areas of expertise. Plan for alternates. Don't underestimate how much time it can take to organize.

Panel Discussion

Use panelists to frame the discussion. Limit the number of panelists to three or four, and keep the initial presentations short, about five to ten minutes.

Facilitated Dialogue

After the panelists have spoken, open the dialogue to others in the room.

Many of us dread the clash between scientific knowledge and religious belief. For most academics, these are entirely different points of reference, and so we avoid or disallow arguments in our classrooms where one way of making knowledge entangles with another way. But if we avoid these conversations, we teach the wrong lessons and miss the many teaching and learning moments lurking within. This essay describes one person's evolutionary journey from avoiding these conversations to welcoming them.

An Evolutionary Tale: Transforming an Attitude

Dr. Leslie Cornick

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Encountering Religion

I've encountered religion in virtually every science class I've ever taught, starting with the very first one. I was a senior undergraduate teaching assistant in my university's Ecology, Evolution, and Behavior program. It was my first experience as a teaching assistant, and the course was Organismal and Evolutionary Biology. I was leading about twenty first-year biology majors in an exercise about the Cambrian explosion and the development of animal body plans when a young man interrupted. "The fossil record was placed by Satan to tempt Man from God," he said, tossing a few small pamphlets around. The pamphlets touted the "truth:" divine creation of life in its modern form.

I was utterly blindsided and completely unprepared to respond, so I didn't. Instead I said, "Okaaay..." in a long uncomfortable tone and returned to the exercise. To my great relief, that was the end of it. That student challenged me no further, and the class returned to normal, at least on the surface. Not my finest teaching moment, perhaps, but hey: I was only three short years of training beyond this young man. I still had time to improve.

Fast-forward eleven years, as I am preparing the first day of my first faculty teaching experience as a Visiting Professor of Vertebrate Biology at a small, liberal arts college on the East Coast. The vivid memory of my undergraduate teaching experience (moment of horror) at the forefront of my mind, I decided the best approach was to head controversy off at the pass. Armed with a carefully worded paragraph from the syllabus, I confronted the class.

"The topic of vertebrate biology," I told them, "rests soundly on the foundation of the single unifying theory of biology: evolution by natural selection. In order to master the course material in this class you'll need to also master this fundamental theory. You don't have to believe it, but you do have to understand it."

“The topic of vertebrate biology,” I told them, “rests soundly on the foundation of the single unifying theory of biology: evolution by natural selection. In order to master the course material in this class you’ll need to also master this fundamental theory. You don’t have to believe it, but you do have to understand it. I understand that it might conflict with the religious views that some of you hold, and if you have conflicts of this nature, I encourage you to discuss them with your pastor or other religious mentor. I would be glad to talk about this further during office hours.” (This was a lie: I was terrified that someone would actually show up.) “But I will NOT, under any circumstances, entertain the topic in class.”

With that I firmly closed the door on controversy, feeling proud as a card-carrying member of the National Center for Science Education. I had done my job to keep God out of my science classroom. My own sacred space was protected from the infidel (religious metaphor very definitely intended).

Engaging Religion

Three years later, after a year of practicing new and innovative techniques for engaging controversy in the classroom, I am at the other end of my evolutionary arc. This year, as I again taught courses that rest on the foundations Darwin so eloquently laid, I have also been open to conversations about religious ideas and where they may be perceived to conflict with evolutionary theory. In fact, I’ve actually come to encourage these conversations.

Last year, for example, I taught a first-year seminar course called *Science as a Way of Knowing*. I gave brief lectures on the criteria for scientific theory¹ and the criteria for ideology,² followed by the fundamentals of evolution by natural selection and a brief summary of intelligent design.³ Then I asked the students to work in small groups to determine into which model both evolution and intelligent design might fall. The exercise explicitly invited students to consider evolution as an ideology if they wished to.

Why this new courage (stupidity, some might say)?

First, I’ve learned that there are teaching moments for all students in discussing the conflicts between religious views and the theory of evolution. The conversation provides an opening for explaining the nature of the scientific method as a process, rather than a collection of facts. I can show evolution as an elegant example of that process in its development from hypothesis to theory to paradigm (which, I would argue, is its real status today, given its overwhelming support both from evidence and also from the global community of scientists). I also find the comparison of ideas about the origin of life (divine creation vs. evolution) to be an excellent model for students to learn the difference between inductive reasoning and the hypothetico-deductive reasoning primarily used in science. These types of discussions encourage students to go deeper, to think critically, and to find their own path to understanding, rather than to simply open their gullets to the regurgitated wisdom of the academy.

There have been teaching or learning moments for me as well. I’ve learned that in order for students to feel safe engaging in new ideas, especially those that conflict with the values or traditions learned throughout childhood, they need first to feel respected. By not responding to that first-year biology student all those years ago, I did respond. I informed him, in action if not in words, that his beliefs were not worthy of a thoughtful, intellectual response. By not engaging his comments, I

1 Popper, “Science: Conjectures and Refutations.”

2 Neuman, *Social Research Methods*.

3 Discovery Institute, website.

dismissed his importance in the classroom, in the major, in science. I have no idea what that young man ended up doing in his life, but if it didn't include science, then I may have been at least partially to blame.

A student who feels that his or her opinions are taken seriously, even when they are in conflict with the course content, may be more likely to take the opinions of others (including the professor) seriously as well. If we model civil discourse and openness to all viewpoints (not just the ones that match learning objectives defined in the syllabus), then we may foster those same skills and habits in our students. If we believe that our lessons transcend the classroom (and we all secretly do, don't we?), might not our students then engage in civil discourse in the society? Might we not send off future generations of citizens who understand that coming from one's own position with strength and conviction does not require the demonizing of all other positions?

Finally, I've decided that it isn't my job to decide for my students whether to believe in evolution; it's my job to teach them about it. It is also not my job to divorce students from their religious beliefs, whether or not they are in conflict with evolution. I still tell them that although they don't have to believe in evolution to succeed in the class, they do have to understand it, particularly if they intend to become practicing scientists—you really can't have one without the other. The difference is that I no longer silence them if they disagree. Now I engage them in the conversation.

So how did that first-year seminar exercise turn out? The students unanimously concluded that evolution is a theory and intelligent design is an ideology. Even the self-declared young earth creationist concurred. I don't know if he changed his mind and became a card-carrying evolutionist (somehow, I doubt it). Nor do I know if he had a crisis of faith. But what's important is that he was able to discuss his ideas and the ideas of others, many of which contradicted his own, in a safe intellectual space. There were no raised voices, no disparaging remarks: there was only civil discourse about important ideas in the teaching of science and the understanding of the nature of the universe.

I believe I have come full circle. And I know I have done my job.

Dr. Cornick's first-year students developed the following criteria for understanding the differences between scientific theories and ideologies.

Criteria for Scientific Theory

- Makes predictions about future/unknown events
- Forbids certain things to happen (in other words, it considers a specific set of conditions)
- Is testable
- Is refutable by contrary evidence
- Is falsifiable
- Is modified based on new evidence
- Contains no moral/value judgments

Criteria for Ideology

- Offers absolute certainty
- Has all the answers
- Fixed, closed, finished (i.e., unchangeable)
- Blind to opposing evidence
- Locked into specific moral beliefs
- Highly partial
- Has contradictions, inconsistencies
- Rooted in specific position

If science sometimes seems more like a religion than a discipline that produces knowledge, perhaps that is because science is often taught in a way similar to religious catechism, with rote memorization of previously established facts. This essay describes a more active practice-centered approach to teaching science, using introductory-level research projects that get students to use the scientific method for themselves. In science, one starts with a question or an idea about why something is happening and then looks for evidence that supports or refutes that idea. If the idea is correct, that's great. But if it's wrong, that's also important. Either way, you now know more about the object or phenomenon you are studying. If students understand the practice of science, they may also experience the fun of it, including the pleasure of discovering new knowledge and the importance of being able to change their minds based upon empirical evidence.

Laying the Groundwork for an Appreciation of Science

Dr. Travis Rector

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There are no easy answers to the question of how to effectively address the conflict between scientific knowledge and religious beliefs in the classroom. There are too many variables, and too many different ways in which the issue can manifest. Although some conflict may be inevitable, much of the discussion on how to handle it focuses on flash points, where the conversation has already become uncomfortable and/or heated. I try to focus on preparation instead: on laying the groundwork carefully for useful discussion to follow.

Setting the Stage

A major problem students in a science class face is that they don't understand the process of science, or how scientific research is done. This is largely the result of how science is usually taught in our secondary schools. Students are typically presented with textbooks filled with facts and concepts and then tested on how well they have understood (or at least memorized) them. The facts and concepts are results of the scientific process, of course, but the process itself is not seen. For fear of presenting information that will later be found to be incorrect or incomplete, textbooks tend to focus on what is very well known, further obscuring the role and process of research. Very few science teachers at the secondary level have experience with scientific research themselves; they may not understand how it is done either. The situation is somewhat like learning the rules of baseball from someone who has read quite a bit about it, but has never played the sport. Something is missing.

Students, therefore, usually come into a collegiate science classroom with well-reinforced misconceptions about the nature of science. From what they have seen, science is simply information in a textbook. They don't understand where it came from. In many ways, being told to learn (or memorize) the material is little different than being catechized in a religious setting. It's no wonder that some of them resist it, especially if the concepts or facts being presented conflict with their own deeply held beliefs.

Practice

To understand the process of science, students need to have the opportunity to practice it themselves. I give them that opportunity by assigning in-class research projects (different from traditional lab exercises) that put students to work answering an authentic question and trying to discover something that is not yet known. In the process, students learn something about the nature of scientific research, the importance of perspective, and the difference between what we want to be true and what is actually true. The entire exercise demonstrates that science is something far beyond facts to be memorized. It is the process by which we learn.

A project I often assign has students study traffic flow around campus. Traffic is a common experience that can be viewed from a number of perspectives, yet it is not as emotionally loaded as other questions may be. Students take measurements with video cameras, radar guns, and sound meters to determine how traffic moves at different times of the day. The information is used to determine objectively what factors lead to safety violations and traffic problems such as congestion. Students can then make informed recommendations on ways to improve traffic flow and safety.

At the start of the project, students complete a values-based questionnaire that asks them to respond to statements such as “drivers should not exceed the posted speed limit” and “slower cars should move out of the left lane when faster traffic is approaching.” Students answer each question yes or no, and indicate how strongly they feel (from “slightly agree” to “strongly agree”). After completing the questionnaire, they are instructed to find another student who answered directly the opposite on one or more of the questions. Students then discuss why they feel differently and try to understand (if not necessarily agree with) the other’s viewpoint.

This understanding is important, because science attempts to study and measure parameters that are independent of perspective or of personal desires. For this project, the goal is to understand how traffic actually moves through an intersection, not to verify the student’s preconceived notion of how it moves or ought to move. The scientist’s goal is to understand the phenomenon, not to be right or wrong. Having a hypothesis is important, but it is just as important to reject the hypothesis should your measurements not support it.

Students usually come into a collegiate science classroom with well-reinforced misconceptions about the nature of science. From what they have seen, science is simply information in a textbook. They don’t understand where it came from.



Travis’s values-based questionnaire was adapted from the Questions and Categories exercise presented by Dr. Kerri Morris in Chapter 2.

As a result of participating in this research project, students should have a better understanding of two key concepts about scientific research. First, science is the process by which we generate knowledge. Second, through the process of scientific research, we often discover that our preconceived notions are incorrect. But that's all right. It is more important to understand a phenomenon correctly than to be right or wrong.

Understanding the difference between knowledge and belief

In another assignment, students are asked to reflect on the difference between what we believe and what we know. The distinction is important but also easily confused. In simple terms, the difference between knowledge and belief is whether or not there is evidence to support it. This is actually more subtle than it sounds, as the evidence must preferentially support one hypothesis over others. For example, finding a twenty-dollar bill on the street might be interpreted as evidence of good luck. But it is actually inconclusive, because it is also consistent with random chance. If you interpret finding the money as a sign you should head for the nearest casino, you're doing so based upon the belief that you will be lucky at the slot machines. This is not the same thing as knowing it will be so.

For the assignment, I have students read excerpts from a survey done by edge.org, a Web site devoted to science, in which scientists and thinkers from a variety of fields are asked to describe something they believe is true, but that they do not know is true. Several of the responses address religious issues, but most do not. I ask students to compare two responses that seem to be in conflict, and to discuss what would need to be learned to determine which is correct. I also ask students to reflect on something (non-religious) that they believe is true, but do not know to be true. The goal is to become aware of the boundary between what we know and what we do not. This is where science works, on the boundary between the two.



A technique for getting students involved in the practice of science so that they will understand it as a process of discovering knowledge.

- Select a question that is open to measurement, but not tremendously loaded with emotion or identity.
- Develop a values questionnaire to help students discover their own preconceived notions and values about the topic.
- Ask students to compare their responses with classmates who disagree, and determine what they'd need to find out to resolve the differences.
- Have students go out in the field and take actual measurements, analyze and present their findings, and make recommendations.

This assignment was developed by Travis Rector.

Most scientists are actually cautious and conservative about using the word “knowledge,” reserving it for only the most well-established theories. Even then, many consider it to be bordering dangerously on arrogance. More typically, we use mathematics and statistics to quantify our level of confidence. We don’t usually say that we know something to be true; instead we say that there’s a high probability or we have a high degree of confidence that it is true. We tend to use the word “belief” to describe an idea that we think might be true, but for which the evidence is insufficient or inconclusive. For example, in the edge.com survey, physicist Kenneth Ford describes chemical evidence on Earth that leads him to believe microbial life exists elsewhere in our galaxy. Since direct evidence of microbial life outside of the Earth has not yet been obtained, he chooses to describe it as a belief.

Unfortunately, we’re not always consistent. In another survey example, psychologist David Buss states, “I know true love exists. I just can’t prove it.” If he means to say that it is impossible to find evidence that demonstrates true love does exist, then it will remain a belief. And in this sense he should not state that he knows it to be true, no matter how strong his desire for it to be so.

Religion in the Science Classroom

Hopefully, as a result of participating in these activities, students will be better prepared to understand conflicts between religiously held beliefs and knowledge obtained through the scientific process. The origin of the conflict is straightforward: the scientific process can generate evidence that challenges the veracity of many beliefs, some of which are deeply held. The conflict also extends to how knowledge itself is valued. Religious traditions tend to be valued for their age and history, whereas science is eager to embrace new findings. In large part, a resistance to scientific discovery is a fear of the loss of the voice of authority. To be wrong on one issue may invite criticism on others.

It is important to note that religions do adapt. What once might have been interpreted as threatening to a religion’s beliefs is often later accepted. The flat Earth and Earth-centered universe concepts are obvious examples of models once considered to be essential to many religions, including Christianity, that are no longer (widely) accepted. Many religions have also become more accepting of recent scientific models, such as the origin and age of the universe and, to a lesser degree, evolution. What is important for students to understand is that many religious beliefs originated at a time when little or no knowledge about these topics existed. For example, the shape of the Earth is obvious to us now because of pictures we’ve seen from space. But it still isn’t obvious from daily experience. Our ancestors could not have known then what we know now. And they are not to be faulted for this. What we can be faulted for is an unwillingness to change our minds when presented with compelling evidence.

Hopefully, as a result of participating in these activities, students will be better prepared to understand conflicts between religiously held beliefs and knowledge obtained through the scientific process.

Students who are vehemently opposed to science are unlikely to change their minds. Even if they were so inclined, many of them would face severe repercussions for disagreeing with their religion's values and decrees, up to and possibly including expulsion from their social group or even their family. My goal instead is to help those students who are genuinely confused by the conflict and interested in improving their understanding. If students can begin to understand the process of science and the distinction between knowledge and belief, they will better understand the motivations for rejecting or accepting scientific knowledge. Hopefully it will become clear why some

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disagree with a scientific theory. It is not because they disagree with the evidence that supports that theory, but because they don't want the theory to be correct. Understanding their own motivations in the research projects they do will hopefully clarify this distinction.

Naturally, student attitudes will be largely influenced by their opinion of science in general. Do they see science as a positive factor in their lives? It may help to discuss what life was like fifty or one hundred years ago. How have our lives changed by what we've learned through the scientific process? And their attitudes are also, of course, largely influenced by their opinion of you, and of their experiences in past science courses. If you are able to create a classroom setting in which students enjoy the process of science, with interesting and challenging research projects, they are more likely to be enthusiastic about science and what we can learn from it.

You can chart people's openness to religion and evolution on a classic bell curve. There are a few people at one end in the "if evolution, no God" camp. There are a few at the other end in the "if God, no evolution" camp. But the vast majority are somewhere in between, believing in at least some version of God, accepting at least some of the evidence for evolution, or straddling the fence in some way between the two. These are the ones we can teach.

Leslie Cornick
Marine Biology and Statistics

Disagreement is an essential part of dialogue; instead of fearing it, we need to harness it as a pedagogical tool. This essay lays the groundwork for productive disagreement by placing it in historical and theoretical contexts and uses the technique of reframing to lower the stakes, allowing students to hold their own views however tightly they want or need to, but at the same time asking them to consider the broader social and political implications of those views in the world around them.

Owning Up to (the) Discipline: An Approach to Dealing with Religion and Politics in the Literature Classroom

Dr. Daniel T. Kline

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A cornerstone of my pedagogical and professional practice is what Gerald Graff and others have called “teaching the conflict.” In my specialty area, literary and cultural studies, this generally means a couple of different things. First, to detail the conscientious process by which a scholarly idea was formed rather than simply relating the current consensus. And second, to move deliberately to the questions or underlying issues that class members might otherwise ignore or avoid. The first approach highlights the historical necessity of debate and even passionate dissension in the creation of knowledge. The second requires tact and courage, perhaps most importantly the courage to risk looking silly, foolish, or downright dunderheaded. The ultimate aim is to reframe the purpose of the discussion from claims of opinion and truth to an awareness of effects: what social realities do different interpretations facilitate or constrain?

Conflict, debate, and dissension are vital to academic studies in the humanities; they fuel the engine that drives innovation. To bring this point home, I often spend the first couple of class periods talking about what it is that literary scholars, critics, and theorists actually do when they work, comparing them to professional mathematicians and scientists with their own arcane symbols and complicated equations. The humanities, like

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Teaching the Conflict

Recognizing that disciplinary, theoretical, and social conflicts are the engine that drives innovation in literary studies, Gerald Graff, a University of Chicago literary critic, advocates that we “teach the conflict.” This means that rather than simply reporting the results of professional investigation and pedagogical practice—as if they were verifiable, agreed-upon facts in a scientific sense—academics in the humanities should make transparent and interpretable the conditions under which knowledge is created. In other words, a conflict-aware pedagogy engages not only in the “what” of a text (what we know about it historically and textually) but also the “why” (how we got to know what we think we know). That means involving students in the different academic arguments that have led to specific conclusions.

the sciences, have a long history of discussion and a highly specialized vocabulary for dealing with the complexities of their discipline, and students need to become aware of those complexities and that specialized vocabulary. I try to disabuse them of the commonly held assumption that reading can ever be a simple, uncomplicated, or self-evident process by detailing the ebb and flow of the history of discussion around a given text. I often have to work very hard to convince students that literary criticism is not simply an ivory tower exercise, unrelated to the everyday world of work and relationships. But because I treat the history of the discussion on nearly equal footing with the current scholarly consensus, I am often able to go directly to the controversial aspects of a text and address them for student consideration. I also try to articulate for them real situations where people's lives are affected by how texts are read and interpreted.

Here's an example that I deal with every time I teach my version of English 201, Masterpieces of World Literature I. In covering the literature of the ancient period, we read and discuss the *Epic of Gilgamesh* in its entirety, and there encounter the Babylonian flood story whose hero is Utnapishtim. Many scholars argue that the Babylonian story is older than the biblical story of Noah and the flood,

When students express a literal interpretation of Genesis, I'll let the discussion range freely for a few minutes, until it gets heated, peters out, or just gets uncomfortably silent. Then I'll say something like "Let's see. Scholars and critics have been fussing about this for, oh, at least 300 years or so. Are we going to get to the bottom of it today?" That usually leads to nervous laughter and a palpable sense of relief.

but those arguments don't hold much water (ahem!) with the many biblical fundamentalists in class whose faith stance basically requires them to address perceived attacks on the literal interpretation of the Bible. So, first of all, I know that I may have some difficult dialogue during that class period and thus, second, I'm prepared for it when it arrives.

When students express a literal interpretation of Genesis and argue for the pre-eminence of the biblical account over the Babylonian, I'll often let the discussion range freely for a few minutes: until it gets heated (when two opposing sides are mutually intractable), peters out (when one side seems to have dominated and the other sits fuming or embarrassed or both), or just gets uncomfortably silent. I'll intervene if it gets near to being nasty in any way (I'll call for a "Rewind!" or "Do over!" or say, "Excuse me?" or "Could you please rephrase that?"); otherwise, I'll often just let the silence grow until it's on the edge of being, well, goofy. Then I'll say something like "Okay, how are we going to resolve this?" or "Let's see. Scholars and critics have been fussing about this for, oh, at least 300

years or so. Are we going to get to the bottom of it today?" There's usually both nervous laughter and palpable relief at that moment. Folks are relieved that the discussion didn't escalate into something hurtful. The important thing at this point is that I did not prematurely intervene to stop strong positions or deep feelings from being expressed.

Discourse and Reframing the Debate

Then I take it a step further, using the old therapeutic technique of reframing, adapted here to an academic context. (This will be a long detour before I return to *Gilgamesh* and Genesis, so bear with me.)

The reframing technique I have developed comes out of the work of Michel Foucault and related theorists, who developed an academic practice called genealogy. Simply put, to do genealogy is to consider both 1) the history of the development of the idea; and 2) the institutional contexts in which it developed. That is, ideas (like texts) don't develop in a vacuum but are historically, culturally, and politically situated. The shorthand I use in my classroom is to talk about academic *disciplines* that become invested in and expressed through specific discourses.

Ideas (like texts) don't develop in a vacuum, but are historically, culturally, and politically situated.

(This is my version of the common strategy that says, "Okay, you might personally believe in a literal interpretation of Genesis, and that's fine, but because this is a biology class, you need to know what natural selection is and how it works to pass the class.")

I often assign a couple of theoretically informed readings at the beginning of the term to lay the groundwork for these discussions. Among my current favorites are Stephen Greenblatt's "Culture" and Paul Bové's "Discourse." To bring these seemingly difficult concepts to life in the classroom, I use the very practical example of being in college. I use some version of this lecture/discussion in nearly every class. My blurb often goes something like this (interspersed with the rhetorical questions that allow for the class to interject, and sometimes moving to the board to jot down key words and map the relationship between ideas):

Although many of you may have entered college knowing what you wanted to major in, it's not uncommon for students to change majors two or three times before settling on something they like. I know I did (and maybe I tell them how I was a physics major for two years).

The decision you make, and how you make it, is very much a part of who you are, what your personal needs and ambitions are, and what you want to do when you grow up, right? So, what does that mean when you come into college? It means that a lot of you come in "undecided" and then you choose a major.

And then what do you do? You choose a subject and take courses, and then you graduate as a psychology major, a marketing major, a nurse, or a history major. (Any English majors? Please?)

So, what do colleges do? And what is my job as an English professor? It's to educate you, right? We know we've done our jobs here at UAA if, by the time you leave school, you as a nurse think differently about something than you would as a psych major, or if you're a history major you consider current events differently than would an anthropology major.

When you come into college undecided and you leave with a major and degree, you've chosen a subject and been educated into a discipline, a specific course of study, whose purpose is to allow you to think differently than you did before. That's one way we know, and you can know, if you learned anything beyond the accumulation of new facts: It's that you now think differently from before.

I'm really working the board now. Some folks see right where I'm going; others take some time.

Let's think about these words: subject, education, and discipline.

Subject: *from the Latin, subicere (lit. sub + jacere, to throw under)*

What subjects are you taught in school, in college?

What does it mean to be subject to something or someone, like subject to a king?

To whom or to what are you subjected in college? In this classroom?

What does that mean, practically speaking?

Education: *from the Latin, educare (to rear or to raise up), from educere (to lead forth).*

How is it that you are being led in your education?

What are you being led toward or away from, and by whom?

In what ways are you being raised up?

What does that mean in real life?

Discipline: *from the Latin, disciplina (teaching, learning), in turn derived from discipulus (pupil). Jesus and the _____ ?*

Someone always says, "Disciples."

Who were the Disciples?

"They were followers," is usually a response.

Here, I ask students how they were disciplined as children, and this often elicits funny personal stories. I sometimes also tell a little anecdote about how I was spanked a few times as a child—never more than three whacks—and how I wished that my dad would just beat me with the belt and let me go, but nooooooooo, he had to lecture me, interminably, about being nice to my brother or cleaning up my room or doing what my mom told me to do. "Please, Dad," I implore in a kid's voice. "Just beat me and let me go. Please. Please, just stop talking!" This will often elicit other anecdotes from students about how they have been disciplined over the years.

I pause here and say: "*You know, you're being disciplined right now, right in this classroom.*"

Then I ask, pausing for discussion after each question: "In what ways are you or have you been disciplined in college? How do faculty members and higher education discipline you into a discipline? What are other ways faculty members like me encourage or discourage your work in class or demonstrate to you how I approve or disapprove of your work and behavior, or other aspects of your being in this class?"

By this time, the class usually sees where this is going, and the discussion often turns to things like grades and other obvious indicators. Then I also begin to point out the less obvious things, like gestures, attention, facial expressions, and other forms of reward or censure—or what Greenblatt calls mechanisms of mobility and constraint. With the cat let out of the bag—that we are all involved in a disciplinary process, with me as the disciplinarian and students as the disciplined—the class is usually really thinking and talking about the different ideas I've introduced and the different way of thinking about their experiences in school and elsewhere. If someone is really on the ball, she

or he may mention that students have different mechanisms available to discipline me, like student evaluations, complaint procedures, word of mouth to other students, rumor, gossip, slander, and so on.

I then introduce a diagram on the board, drawn from my reading of Bové, and go into a discussion about the poststructuralist notion of discourse. This is what I'm talking about when I talk about discourse, and this is the sense in which I will use the term throughout the class. Discourse is a way of talking about the relationship of texts and language, even fictional texts, to the real world.

Even more precisely, when I use the term discourse, I'm talking about four always-interrelated things:

- The formation of subject-individuals (like students);
- The relationship of subject-individuals to systems of power (like university faculty and administration);
- The function of different texts (like a university catalog or major checklist) in the mediation of the relationship between students and systems of power; and
- The potential of texts and systems of power to facilitate, mediate, or restrict a subject-individual's ability to negotiate different social structures (like job markets, class standing, and so on).

The diagram doesn't really have any single starting point, so you could begin with social structures or systems of power and then move your way around and through the four axes. My point here, as with the students, is that nearly all texts (fictional, nonfictional, or something in between) in some way mediate these different relationships.

Reframing and Cultural Work

Okay, that's the end of the detour, but it's worth it, because then I can bring the students' attention back to the different perspectives that brought tension into the classroom. At this point I might redirect the question to the biblical fundamentalist or the class in general:

THEORETICAL CONTEXT
Post-structuralist Notions of Discourse

Discourse "helped to constitute and organize an entire field of knowledge about language; it helped discipline the judgment, and thereby the response, of students and teachers; and, in doing so, it revealed its links to forms of power, such as teaching, that can have effects upon the actions of others...[Discourse describes] the surface linkages between power, knowledge, institutions, intellectuals, the control of populations, and the modern state as these intersect in the functions of systems of thought."

Paul Bové

Model of Discourse
(After Foucault and Bové)

Subject: Individual

Texts/ Language

Systems of Power

Social Structures

From what discourse or discourse community does the claim that the biblical flood is a literal event come? (A religious one.)

Within what social structures (or genealogies) does that discourse find its home currently? Historically? (In the church, but sometimes in other venues, like politics.)

How does that discourse relate to different structures of power that believers might find themselves in? (At church it's a truth, but in science class it's controversial.)

What does holding and voicing that opinion do to shape an individual and his or her different roles or relationships? (For believers, it demonstrates their faith and belief to the class and connects them to other believers. It can also make politically or religiously conservative students feel out of step or even persecuted in some classroom settings.)

I can then do the same thing with other perspectives (anthropological, linguistic, archaeological, gender studies, etc.) and texts (*Gilgamesh*, Genesis, or virtually any text), using whatever the class gives me to work with. You can do a similar thing with Republicans and Democrats, Marxists and monarchists, atheists and fundamentalists, and so on. In other words, the perspectives articulated in class are part of broader discourses in which students operate, and they naturally mobilize these different perspectives at different times for different purposes. The purpose of this discussion is to begin to make students aware of what they might have been blind to before, to bring into awareness what they thought was natural and self-evident.



Reframing the Discussion

This technique uses the notion of reframing to uncover hidden historical, social, and political dimensions and to articulate the discursive effect of a position.

Step one: Identify the discourses informing the particular text.

What discourse or discourse community does this view come from?

In what social or political structures is this view most at home?

How does this discourse relate to different power structures that believers might find themselves in?

What does holding and voicing this opinion do to shape individuals and their different roles or relationships?

Step two: Identify the cultural work it is trying to accomplish.

What kind of cultural work is this view doing or attempting to do? Is it getting someone to believe in something, act in a specific way, or change his or her mind about something?

Who loses? Who gains? Which groups benefit and which are penalized?

What ideas gain traction because of this perspective, and which ideas are minimized?

What perspectives are mobilized if this view becomes accepted, and which are constrained, limited, or eliminated?

This technique was developed by Dr. Kline out of the theoretical work of Michel Foucault, Stephen Greenblatt, Paul Bové, and Gerald Graff.

This is the first step in reframing the discussion, to have students identify what discourse (or discourses) their perspectives articulate. I do this as part of class discussion, small-group work, or brief (sometimes anonymous) micro themes, and this allows students to become both aware of, and responsible for, their perspectives. The point I make in class is this: All perspectives are legitimate (notice I did not say valid), in that every person in class may have a different personal perspective or interpretation about the issue at hand. However, not all perspectives are equally well-argued, logically sound, or equally supported by textual evidence. How cogently one presents an argument in favor of a particular perspective does a great deal to establish its legitimacy and validity.

But no matter the perspective, all discourses (and all texts) do cultural work; they attempt to get something done: describe, explain, convince, entertain, persuade, move to action, and so on. The second step in reframing, then, is to ask, “What kind of cultural work is this text trying to do, and what kind of cultural work is a specific interpretation of that text trying to do?” Without fail, what this does is shift the focus of attention from “Who’s right and who’s wrong?” to “What are the different implications and varied consequences each interpretation attempts to create?”

Thus, I can ask the biblical literalist or hard-core atheist or radical feminist or conservative Republican (or any other student with any other perspective) without prejudice about the discourse or genealogy of their claim (step one of reframing), and call upon them not to establish the truth of that position but rather to analyze its discursive effects (step two of reframing) in specific cultural or historical circumstances. Rather than fear, offense, or scandal, I often hear students say, “I’d never thought of it that way before.” To me, that’s a mark of success.

Rather than fear, offense, or scandal, I often hear students say, “I’d never thought of it that way before.” To me, that’s a mark of success.

Assignments

To facilitate this approach in my literature classes, I ask each student to be a Discussion Starter twice during the term, once as a Primary Respondent to the day’s reading and once as a Secondary Respondent. The assignment gives students some ownership over the content of the course and the direction of discussion.

I also use a short one-minute feedback or micro-theme exercise periodically to give otherwise reticent students a chance to offer their thoughts or reservations. I set aside the last couple of minutes of class time for students to give me feedback on what’s going on in class. Usually I ask them to identify two things: the most important thing they learned and/or one thing they still have a question or concern about. I’ll use these to give the class feedback at the beginning of the next class period.

There are a number of benefits to this discursive approach, especially in a text-based class. First, it gets the class out of either/or thinking and allows them to examine a number of seemingly familiar (even clichéd) perspectives in a different light. Second, it allows students to cleave to their own personal perspectives as closely as necessary while still requiring them to consider the broader practical consequences of fostering such an opinion. Third, because the reframing lowers the stakes in a confrontation between potentially incompatible worldviews, students can hold their own views without fear of being shamed or undermined. In other words, no single worldview (whatever its

perspective or claims) is completely free from the mechanisms of discipline, so students of all stripes are brought face to face with the practical (that is, social and political) implications of their world-views. The second point is more theoretical (whatever students believe is their own business), but the third point is more practical (students are required to assess the positive and negative effects of their, or any other, position). Finally, since I use this approach in literature and composition classes, the reframing activity makes the process of the course its content as well—and that is literary interpretation.

This discursive approach creates the opportunity (though not the necessity) for students to shift their perspectives. It also allows students to begin to accept responsibility for the practical outcomes of their beliefs. At the same time, students become aware of the possible discursive effects of any particular position or worldview. Because the analytical emphasis is less on the absolute truth of a position and more about its discursive effects, students have told me they feel free to try on different perspectives throughout the term without having to commit to any of them. What students have told me is that this approach impacts the way they view all sorts of communication inside and outside of class, particularly as they look at varieties of mass media and advertising.

Moreover, I know I've turned a corner in the class and done good work when students begin to question my perspectives and interrogate the cultural work that I'm doing in class. When students begin challenging the mechanisms by which they are being disciplined, especially the faculty who exemplify those disciplines, then, I believe, students move from mere learning to true liberal education.

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT

Discussion Starter

As part of your classroom work, you will serve as Primary Respondent for one class period and Secondary Respondent for another.

As the Primary Respondent, you will be responsible for a two- to three-typed page write-up (20 minutes max.) which:

- Presents relevant historical, cultural, or textual information on the day's text;
- Summarizes the day's selection;
- Offers two to three questions, concerns, or statements to initiate discussion; and
- Points to two to three specific passages for the class to examine.

You will, in essence, present a close reading of your text with background commentary. You will need to reproduce copies for the entire class.

As the Secondary Respondent, you are responsible for a one-page summary (one to two paragraphs, typed) of key questions and issues for the text under discussion; and a brief analysis of the "cultural work" this text is attempting to do (based upon your reading of Bové and Greenblatt).

Dan Kline

DIFFICULT DIALOGUE

NATIVE WAYS OF KNOWING

We held the panel discussion on religion again, in our third faculty intensive, just a few weeks later. Leslie and Travis presented much the same material as in the earlier discussion, but this time they were joined by Regina Boisclair, APU Professor of Religious Studies. Dan was not able to attend.

Following the panel presentations, we opened up the discussion to the rest of the room. Almost immediately, one of the faculty members at the table brought up a common critique of evolution. “Evolution is just a theory,” he said. “There are plenty of holes in it. Why does science hate to admit that?” And suddenly there we were, among our colleagues and peers, having a difficult dialogue that has become increasingly common in the culture around us. Were we ready for it? We would soon find out.

“To say it’s ‘just’ a theory,” explained Travis and Leslie, “completely misunderstands what we mean by a theory.” Nonscientists may use the term as if it were basically the same as a guess or an opinion, but to a scientist, they are very different. A guess becomes a hypothesis, which is then used as a framework for designing an experiment or otherwise conducting research to answer the question. Is there evidence to support this guess? Will it hold up under scrutiny? A theory, however, is an explanation that has been already been supported by evidence, over and over again, until virtually everyone who has examined that evidence has come to accept it as the best explanation we have to date of real phenomena. That’s what we mean by the theory of evolution. Most scientists would go even further and place evolution in the category of a law, like gravity. “Some things just are,” said Travis, “whether you believe them or not. Gravity is one of those things, evolution is another. Science is the best way we have of coming to understand such things and seeing them for the way they are.”

“Okay then,” said someone else. “But what about different ways of knowing, what about the Native taxonomies we learned about yesterday, for example? There is evidence to support that system too. It may be gathered differently, filtered differently, presented differently, but why do we think our science is valid and these ways are not?”

Leslie tried to lift the discussion out of a confrontational either/or mode into a more tolerant both/and mode. “I would answer that these two different epistemologies are two completely legitimate ways of knowing. They are like two languages, one of which you would use if you’re whaling up in Barrow and the other you need to use here, in the college classroom, and if you want to get a job in the Department of Fish and Game. For these purposes, in this classroom, I’m going to teach this one.”

Both of these are perfectly reasonable responses—and compassionate ones too. Our scientists were not trying to usurp the territory of religion or deny anyone their traditional way of knowing. They were honoring the traditions of the academy and teaching the cumulative established knowledge of Western science, the stuff that describes ecology, cures diseases, and explores the stars.

But there was still one more challenge to address. “It’s not as simple as that,” said Paul Ongtooguk, the one Alaska Native professor among us that day. It was a tribute to the respect and trust in the room that Paul felt comfortable enough to speak up. Paul is Inupiat, and this was not an abstract discussion to him. “Basically,” he said, “you’re advocating for Native students to be split personalities.”

All week long, Paul had been teaching the other members of the intensive to see the world through his eyes, at least a little. He had shared his taxonomy. He had shared his critiques. He had shared personal experiences with racism. Now he would tell us a story.

It was about an Alaska Native student, a good student, who was doing well in most of her classes. Part way through the semester, however, she began faltering seriously in Biology class, to the point where both her parents and the professor expressed concern. Upon investigation, they discovered that the problem began when the class was required to dissect a frog. The professor thought it might be a religious objection, which he had encountered before. But it turned out to be bigger and more complicated than that.

I told this story in hopes of taking our conversation about science into some fresh territory. Taxonomies that are based on action and function are not merely interesting folklore or quaint cultural artifacts of the Tlingit, Yupik, or Inupiat nations; they are much more interesting than that. A fresh taxonomy creates a new platform from which to view the world, encouraging us to develop new questions and leading to the discovery and creation of new knowledge. Alaska Native taxonomies offer genuine insights about the world. I'm not romantic about this; I realize the insights may be of uneven value. But unevenness is an attribute of all taxonomies and cultures.

Paul Ongtooguk
Education

In the taxonomy of the Tlingit nation (one of three major indigenous nations from the rainforests of Southeastern Alaska) the frog holds a unique position of power, being one of the only animals that can mediate between three different elements: water, land, and air. Because of this attribute, touching frogs is forbidden in Tlingit culture. Furthermore, the Tlingit kinship structures are organized in clans consisting of extended families, and are further divided into two large groups, called moieties (Raven-Frog or Wolf-Eagle). This student was Frog-affiliated. Essentially, what she was being asked to do was to dissect a member of her family.

As Paul completed his story, around the room you could see people start to take in this new information. We'd moved from a difficult dialogue (essentially between two competing Western viewpoints) into a trialogue, with a whole other way of knowing coming into focus. Enough of the other participants had come far enough that, just

for a moment, they could see a bit through Native eyes and glimpse a profoundly different perspective from their own.

The conversation went on from there for a while, heating up, cooling off, and in the end, reaching no real consensus or conclusion. We didn't solve the problem; we ran out of time. The sandwiches arrived, and we broke for lunch. But something palpable had happened during that conversation. Some of us had summoned the courage to challenge our colleagues on issues of fundamental personal importance. Some of us had gained valuable practice in defending our well-reasoned turf. And some of us had realized for the first time that no matter how flexible we thought we were, it was all happening within a particular worldview, and there were other—legitimate—worldviews beyond.

In short, most of us had learned something. For Libby, our facilitator through three faculty intensives, this was a moment when she heaved a sigh and thought, "Wow. For the first time I think we are ready to start the conversation on Native ways of knowing."

Native cultures honor the validity and usefulness of the scientific method and, indeed, employ similar processes of intense observation, evidence gathering, experimentation, peer review, and others. The difference is that they view and interpret that evidence as part of a larger, interconnected system of relationships between the human and natural communities. Native cultural perspectives are deeply ecological and ultimately inclusive, viewing humans as profoundly interdependent with all other life forms and processes rather than somehow outside of that which they are studying. Their example might serve as a reminder to look up from our individual disciplinary silos and view new information as part of a vast, extremely complex, never fully predictable, ever-changing system.

Libby Roderick
Center for Advancing Faculty Excellence



As we move into the third year of our project, we are indeed starting the conversation on Native ways of knowing that began in our intensives and have designated "Alaska's Native Peoples: A Call to Understanding" as the theme for our 2008-09 Books of the Year. See pages 241-245.

START TALKING

Questions for Discussion:

Are there topics you try to avoid in your classrooms? What are the implications of avoiding them versus addressing them?

When you find yourself getting defensive, what do you do that's positive? What do you do that's negative?

How do you address the language of knowledge and belief in your discipline? How can these strategies be applied to difficult dialogues about science, religion, and other ways of knowing?

What is at stake for you personally when your worldview or way of knowing is challenged?

The background features a faint, light-colored illustration of a hand holding a scale of justice. The hand is positioned at the bottom, with the fingers curled around the base of the scale. The scale's vertical pillar and horizontal beams are visible, extending upwards. The entire scene is rendered in a light, muted teal color against a darker teal background.

Business, Politics, Social Justice

***A life spent making mistakes is not
only more honorable but more useful
than a life spent in doing nothing.***

George Bernard Shaw

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FACULTY INTENSIVE

Days 5-365

We never directly addressed business, politics, or social justice during our faculty intensive. But as you can imagine, these things were embedded in many of our earlier conversations, and they regularly came up on their own when we returned to our normal academic lives.

We spent the last day of the intensives talking about what we might do the following year. Our agreement was that we would put what we'd learned into practice in our classrooms, introducing controversial topics, trying new techniques, collecting evaluations, and reflecting on the experience in ways that would be helpful to our colleagues. We also agreed to plan and present at least one intramural workshop or public event related to a difficult dialogue. The agreement was vague as to what controversies we should tackle or what techniques we should employ. The important thing was simply to engage, and then to come back together after a year and share what we'd learned.

Some of us dove right in and started trying stuff in our summer classes; most waited until fall, or even spring. Some of us worked alone, others collaborated, and a few involved students in planning and presenting events. We held inter-campus screenings of provocative films, led public discussions following student theater performances, and convened forums on culture, politics, sexual identity, and the war in Iraq.

It would be nice to say that all these events were completely successful, but it wouldn't be the truth. Collaboration came with its own challenges. Logistics consumed more time than anyone had expected. One organizer spent weeks trying to find a faculty panelist willing to speak in favor of the war in Iraq, only to have him come down with laryngitis on the morning of the event. Theater audience members were more interested in congratulating the student actors than discussing any of the big issues of the play. *Tortilla Curtain* author T.C. Boyle charmed a satisfyingly large audience with an entertaining public reading, but remained steadfastly neutral with regard to the politics of immigration, the privilege of class, and his own point of view.

Other events went much the way we hoped they would. The public discussion on the war in Iraq was a model of civil discourse on a highly charged subject. A discussion of the role and ethics of corporations was spirited, informative, and very well received. A forum on politics in the classroom brought faculty and students together in an open discussion of a topic about which there is considerable disagreement. These and others engaged, and showed us what we can do if we ourselves engage.

Public Events

An Inconvenient Truth. Facilitated discussion following screenings of the film.

Caught Between Two Worlds. Student forum on the experience of living in individualist and collectivist cultures.

The Corporation. Panel discussion following film screening.

Granito de arena (Grain of Sand). Open discussion following film screening.

Issues of Race, Class, and Culture in Alaska's Public Schools. Public forum featuring Jonathon Kozol.

Perspectives on Iraq. Panel discussion featuring peace activist Kathy Kelly.

Politics in the Classroom: What is Appropriate? Faculty/student forum.

The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down. Paperback chats at new student orientation.

The Tortilla Curtain. Community discussions, plus public reading by author T.C. Boyle.

What Do I Call You? What Are You? Discussion forum on gender and sexual identity.

The Women of Lockerbie. Post-show dialogues following selected performances of the play.

BUSINESS

Corporations: Angels or Demons?

Corporations are among the most powerful institutions in modern public life. Some are wealthier than many countries, more powerful than many governments, and their actions impact our communities, environment, economies, and cultures in ways we may not even realize.

Are they beneficial or destructive? Ethical or immoral? These are the questions posed by the documentary film *The Corporation*, which two business colleagues—one from each university—presented to an inter-campus audience of fifty or so participants one Saturday afternoon in November. The film has an unmistakable point of view: corporations are bad for democracy. They destroy our environment and amass resources from the poor for the rich. The presenters hoped to use the film as a starting point for a community conversation about the proper role of business in today's world. Seeking to present balance and a wide array of voices, they invited other faculty colleagues and community members to lead discussions after the screening.

The event was successful, as evidenced by high ratings from participants. The post-film discussion was spirited but civil, as the presenters hoped it would be. But ironically, it was the difficult dialogues that were—or should have been—generated by the presenters themselves in planning and staging the event that lingered in their minds afterwards. In the following conversation, they reflect on their experience and the lessons they learned about planning a successful community discussion.

Using Film to Spark a Community Discussion: Lessons Learned

Dr. Bogdan Hoanca

*Associate Professor of Management Information Systems
University of Alaska Anchorage*

Dr. Tracy Stewart

*Associate Professor of Leadership and Strategy
Alaska Pacific University*

Bogdan: The first lesson was in learning to work together. We knew we had much in common: both of us teach in business programs, and we had developed a good chemistry over the intensive week. But we had no idea how well we would be able to cooperate on this joint venture.

Tracy: This is true. We knew very little about each other and were trying to orchestrate this relatively large event. In many circumstances (new jobs, arranged marriages), people are placed together to perform a task and they get to know each other while the work is being done. In this endeavor, time was short, we were committed to collaboration, and no one was the boss. We learned the nuances of trust, communication, and compromise very quickly.

Bogdan: We also had some lessons to learn about logistics. We didn't know how to estimate the size of our audience. We had no idea if we would have ten people or two hundred, and since it was a public event we couldn't really request RSVPs. We built as much flexibility as possible into our planning, with overflow rooms and a backup DVD, in case the auditorium was not large enough to accommodate the crowd.

Tracy: Right. But I think we also should have planned for more discussion time and provided some kind of food. We underestimated how long people might be willing to remain for discussion. In the future, I would try to ask a sample of potential attendees about possible timeframes and formats to broaden my thinking. The food is really a no-brainer. Providing a snack would have given people a needed boost and allowed for some unstructured discussion time.

Bogdan: We had two very different views of how to manage the audience interactions following the film. Tracy wanted to have small breakout groups to talk about various themes, such as environmental, legal, ethical, and labor issues, with facilitators to manage small group discussion. I wanted to have a panel discussion, with a duel of opposing viewpoints to get things rolling, and then audience participation in the form of questions to the panel and each other.

Tracy: I didn't think we would need to fuel the debate; I was pretty sure it would bubble up on its own. And I'm not a big fan of panel discussions. I think the format risks narrowing the discussion to the dominant viewpoints represented by the selected panelists. My goal was to involve a wide range and number of faculty from both campuses taking part in the controversial dialogue. In hindsight, I think I should have articulated this desired outcome more clearly. It might have helped us if we'd had a difficult dialogue about our own goals while planning the event.

Bogdan: We decided to plan for both approaches and use the breakout groups if the audience was big enough and the panel discussion if it was not. The mistake was that each of us invited people with a view for their preferred format. Half of the colleagues we invited were eager to facilitate discussions on their favorite topic or area. The other half thought they'd get to debate a topic with one or more opponents. Panel participants tend to be people who like to talk, and who were focused on getting their message out. Discussion leaders are better at listening and facilitating.

Tracy: That comment about panelists is precisely why I have concerns about using a panel. I wanted other participants to have space to get their messages out as well. We did invite our colleagues in different ways, but I think it mattered less whom we invited than how we invited them. The APU faculty members weren't necessarily better small group leaders or listeners and facilitators. They were asked to volunteer to serve in that role, so they came expecting it. Many of them would have gladly sat on a panel to present and strongly defend a particular perspective. In fact, one of them graciously stepped aside when more panelists than expected showed up and no others were willing to relinquish their chairs. This very conservative, pro-business colleague deferred to three UAA

Our intention was for the discussion to be fair and balanced, yet the film itself has a clear and well-known message against business and for the environment.

professors and two community activists in the interest of not having the panel overwhelm audience participation.

Bogdan: On the day of the screening, faced with an audience of about fifty people, we decided to offer both approaches. We set up small rooms with the breakout group topics indicated on the doors, and a larger room where we located the panel discussion tables. At intermission, we announced that people could vote with their feet by joining either the larger panel discussion or one of the smaller groups. We encouraged people to move about from room to room as they found it most appropriate for their interests.

We repeated this announcement at the end of the film. To our surprise, an audience member immediately countered with an alternate suggestion. “Why don’t we all go to the panel discussion,” he said, “so that everybody gets to hear everybody else?” The entire audience seemed to agree and moved en masse to the panel discussion room, where we proceeded with a very heated discussion about the film. The facilitators for the breakout groups made sure there were no people interested in the small group discussions (there were none), and then joined in with the panel discussion group.

It is interesting to walk away from the same event with two different impressions of what occurred, yet this is often the source of difficult dialogues.

Tracy: I was both impressed with and concerned about these group dynamics. The suggestion for everyone to attend the panel so that all could be heard had some logic. On the flip side, with a relatively small group and what we know about group dynamics, it would have taken a very strong person to say “no” and request not to follow the suggestion.

Bogdan: Regarding content, our intention was for the discussion to be fair and balanced, yet the film itself has a clear and well-known message against business and for the environment. The audience it drew seemed to be rooting for the same side of the debate. Two of the panelists represented activist

groups, and they insisted on speaking to the audience from this point of view as well. We had invited an oil company executive to represent the opposite point of view, but the invitation was declined (partly because of very short notice). “What did we expect?” commented one of our business colleagues. “Business people may have better things to do than talk about a film; they’re busy out there, in the real world, making money.”

Tracy: Clearly the film’s point of view aligned with some audience members’ passions, but I disagree that it drew a biased audience. The panelists represented a range of views, pro-business to anti-business. I was not surprised that those representing the activist groups insisted on an activist perspective or that the economist presented an economic perspective. The UAA professors represented a range of pro-business points of view. This goes squarely back to my earlier point about the need for us to have worked out our objectives more clearly beforehand. If we had consciously identified balance as a primary objective at the outset, we could have planned to show a second, clearly pro-business film as a counterpoint. We could also have used facilitation to raise other perspectives or critique the perspective presented.

Bogdan: To me, the discussions seemed far from balanced. The topics followed the main threads in the movie, leaning principally toward social justice issues, and against corporate interests. The business faculty panelists were the only voices in the room to make the case for corporations. On a positive side, this allowed for more time to discuss opinions that everybody in the room embraced. On a negative side, most people in the audience had their point of view confirmed or reinforced, rather than challenged and expanded. Rather than a difficult dialogue, this was actually a fairly easy one.

Tracy: It is so interesting to walk away from the same event with two different impressions of what occurred, yet this is often the source of difficult dialogues. I was initially disappointed that the entire group chose to attend the panel, but I was very gratified by the outcome of the discussion. I had a very different experience than Bogdan on the balance of perspectives. I heard a wide continuum, and not just from the panelists. This was not a homogeneous audience. Our facilitator, Libby Roderick, ensured both civility and balance. No one voice dominated the discussion; all who wanted to express themselves were heard. The discourse was limited, not by homogeneity, but by time. A major lesson for me was how to create sufficient time to allow for the civil discourse on difficult topics.

Bogdan: Another area where we could have done better was in the follow-up after the event. Several people in the audience were interested in taking a more active role, united as a group. We collected contact information from participants and distributed the list to participants, but we did not lead any effort to bring them together again. As far as we know, nobody in the group initiated any follow-up efforts to bring the group back together.



A few tips for using a film to generate a community discussion.

Do

- Choose a film with rating and length appropriate for the audience.
- Plan for time at the beginning to introduce the film, and frame a few questions for consideration.
- If the film is long, plan for a break, and announce it at the start.
- Allow for a break at the end of the film, transitioning to the discussion.
- Announce the discussion time in advance, for those who have already seen the film and only want to show up for the discussion.

Don't

- Don't show a film that is longer than two hours.
- Don't forget about people with disabilities. Turn on captioning, if available. Check lighting conditions, screen size, and seating.

Tracy: Very true, but I would add that Bogdan and I should have had our own follow-up as well. After the screening, we more or less went our own separate ways again. I know I could have learned an immense amount by post-processing this more thoughtfully with my colleague.

Bogdan: Tracy is right about the difficult dialogues we avoided between ourselves. We did focus more on the event and less on having our own difficult dialogues in the planning and follow-up stages. As in the classroom, we teach best when we model what we want our students to learn. We can use these lessons in shaping future events.

Tracy: Overall, I appreciated the respectful, collegial experience we had. We accomplished something of value. The fact that it was a joint event between our two universities, that it was a civil discussion of many different difficult topics, and that we learned so much from the experience feels successful. I still dislike panel discussions as a format, but I can honestly say I see their value as one form of catalyst for difficult dialogues. I walked away reminded that there are many different paths to the same end.



For another example of using a film as the basis for community and classroom discussions, see page 194.

Emerging controversies lend themselves to fruitful analysis precisely because so little is known about them. Students can approach these questions with fresh thinking and fewer emotions, and they may be more willing to explore multiple considerations before choosing their own position. This essay explores a few emerging areas of controversy in business and technology that are likely to influence our lives in the years to come.

Emerging Controversies in Business and Technology

Dr. Bogdan Hoanca

*Associate Professor of Management Information Systems
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There are many controversies in the world of business and technology that most people, including most undergraduate business students, just aren't aware of. At first, when I introduce topics like net neutrality, key escrow, and statistical discrimination in my classes, I am met with mostly blank stares. Say what? These topics don't sound threatening or push any one's buttons. Controversial? As one student pointed out to me this year, "It's not like we're discussing abortion."

Yet these topics, and many others, are hotly debated in Internet business circles. And they will affect our way of living whether we are aware of them or not. Technology has changed the way we live, in both obvious and subtle, even insidious, ways. The abundance of e-commerce options may be obvious, but the new ways for companies to collect data, mine it, and use the results for price research and discrimination are less well known. E-commerce is here to stay, with positive effects on consumer choices and negative effects on neighborhood stores. Price discrimination, on the other hand, is still in the future, and we may have time to stop it from occurring, if we so decide.

We are more familiar with certain controversial topics because of the intense human emotions they trigger and the way they tend to polarize audiences. These are what you might call the "classics:" evolution versus creation; cultural, racial and gender issues; the right to life versus the right to choose. On most of these questions, most of us have already taken a side. And most of us probably feel pretty passionately about the side we've chosen.

Some of the emerging controversies in business and technology are so new that students do not even realize their full implications. In many ways, this makes them ideal topics for exploring how we react to controversy. Because tempers are less likely to flare, it is easier to explore these topics in the classroom and manage the discussion. The result can be more powerful learning, both about the topic as well as about the debate process itself.

Cognitive stages

When students explore emerging business and technical issues, they may go through four cognitive stages of controversy. Teachers who introduce emerging issues may wish to consider the cognitive progression described below.

At first, we're not even aware that a controversy is out there. This corresponds to the cognitive state known as unconscious ignorance. We don't know that we don't know. When I bring up a topic like net neutrality or key escrow, at first my students are just blank. They don't know what these

topics are or what's at stake. They don't perceive the topic as controversial; they may not even see much difference between the two sides.

A little information can bring us to a second stage known as conscious ignorance. We know that we don't know. This stage can be motivating, spurring us on to ask questions, do the research, and learn even more about the topic. Understanding grows as each new piece of information comes in, and with it comes a tendency to lean toward one side or another. I can watch this happen in the classroom as students begin to express lukewarm preference for certain points of view over others.

Some of the emerging controversies in business and technology are so new that students do not even realize their full implications.

This is a natural progression, almost as if we are "assigned" a side, not because we chose it, but because the first arguments we heard or the people we happened to interact with were people who are on that side.

As we learn even more, we may get to a third stage of conscious knowledge, knowing that we know, and being able to apply that knowledge when we focus our attention on it. This is the point when the divide becomes apparent, as we encounter and explore opposing points of view, comparing those ideas to the first ones we developed, and focusing our attention, with conscious effort, on each side in turn or both sides at once.

The fourth stage, ideally, is unconscious knowledge, when we are able to apply the learning automatically, without a need to focus our attention on the task at hand. Finally, we may learn how to transcend the gap and to leap seamlessly from one side of the debate to the other, understanding very well when and why we so choose to leap.

Technology and business issues may be ideal topics for exploring the cognitive stages of controversy. Because the emotional baggage associated with these issues is often much less than for other controversies, this fourth stage might be less of a leap, allowing students to experience duality in less threatening areas of their lives.

Example

An example might be in order here. One topic we explore in my Management Information Systems class is known as personalized pricing. The question is whether businesses should be allowed to use information systems to collect data about customers, in order to price items as high as customers would be willing to pay. By collecting transaction data over time, an online business can actually determine a customer's willingness to pay or to haggle—to save money or to save time—and may be able to optimize the offer price to maximize the amount they can get from a given customer. The issue is complex enough and novel enough for many students to encounter it at the first stage of cognition: they have no idea whether this personalized pricing should be allowed or not. Many students have just never even considered the possibility.

Topics like personalized pricing work very well for in-class debate assignments. Students sign up for topics in teams of two. They can research the topic together, but they will end up arguing on opposite sides of the debate. Because they don't know in advance which side they will be called upon to argue, they need to prepare equally for both sides of the question. We toss a coin to determine sides at the beginning of the debate.

At first, students naturally gravitate toward issues that are relevant to them. Some tend to see the question as an issue of free markets' right to set prices. Others will see it as a fairness issue. During their research, students will uncover arguments for both these positions and notice examples of how these forces are already shaping our lives. As the debate and discussion progress, students seem to grow more willing to see the other side; a few even switch sides or grow equally comfortable with both.

Implications

In exploring emerging controversies, students may realize that they have the power to make changes to policies and conditions that directly affect their lives. Between evolution and creationism, the choice is one of belief in what's already happened. Technology controversies are still on the drawing table, on par with controversies in economic planning or legislative action. These difficult dialogues not only lead to a better understanding and tolerance of alternative opinions, but also may lead to better decisions and outcomes.

We move from the first stage of not even knowing about controversies, through knowing one side, knowing both sides, and finally to knowing how to leap back and forth between the two. In the process, we learn which side we want to choose, not just because of our peer group, but with a deeper understanding of the whole issue. We explore both alternative opinions and also alternative futures depending on which side we choose. We can then make educated choices to influence legislation, technology development, and social forces to determine the future of our choice.

In exploring emerging controversies, students may realize that they have the power to make changes to policies and conditions that directly affect their lives.



For more on developing propositions and staging classroom debates, see page 53.

POLITICS

Fall 2006 was election season in Alaska. Incumbent Governor Frank Murkowski was defeated in the Republican primary by former Wasilla Mayor Sarah Palin. Palin went on to defeat her Democratic opponent, former Governor Tony Knowles, in the November general election, becoming Alaska's first female governor.

Election politics found their way into the classroom as well, sparking a conversation that began in the UAA campus newspaper and eventually spilled over into a student-faculty forum on whether and when politics are appropriate in the classroom. It began with a letter to the editor in which a student complained that he'd "had it" with politically biased professors at UAA. The newspaper took a similar position in a follow-up editorial, noting instances of what it called "political

discrimination:" students feeling forced to adopt a professor's politics for the sake of a better grade.

English professor Dr. Dan Kline took exception to what he perceived as the inaccurate and stereotypical thinking of this response and wrote his own letter to the editor. His five-page single-spaced response laid out the necessity for free speech in an academic context, argued that the classroom is "always already" a political space, asserted the faculty member's right to control course content, and critiqued the newspaper's citation of an American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) report as an unreliable source, itself motivated by partisan political purposes. Following a respectful dialogue with the student editor in which the words "length" and "established guidelines" appeared more than once, Dan's response was edited down to a few tight paragraphs and published in the December 5th edition.

From five pages down to less than one page. I had been disciplined—a faculty member, subjected by a student to the rules of a discipline not my own—and everyone who read the response knew it. I could have broken off my participation at that point, but a key aspect of the *Difficult Dialogues* project for me has been to remain engaged even when offended in some way. The point was not so much to convince the editor or readers to my perspective—although that would be nice—but to remain *engaged in the discussion*.

Dan Kline
English

In the spring, English professor Dr. Patricia

Jenkins organized a broader public forum featuring the letter-writer, the editor, the English professor, and two other panelists. Each panelist spent a couple of minutes sharing his general perspectives on politics in the classroom before responding to two hypothetical situations designed to highlight the potential flash points in politically charged activities on campus.

The next few pieces include the letter that sparked the debate, the newspaper editor's response, the English professor's full counter-response, an analysis of the forum, a reflection on student freedom of speech from the newspaper's faculty adviser, and a further reflection from the professor who organized the forum. Together, these six pieces summarize a local instance of a larger conversation on politics in the classroom that has implications for our academic freedom and our students' right to free expression.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR
OCTOBER 24, 2006

Partisan politics have no place in classrooms at UAA

I have had it with politically biased professors at UAA. My first encounter with this bias was when a professor said, “The more educated you become, the more liberal you become.” Next, in an upper-division political science class, students spent an hour bashing Gov. Frank Murkowski. At the end of class, I said, “This is ridiculous, and even worse, it’s not educational.” The professor replied, “I thought it was educational.”

These are just two examples, but I have more. Look, if I wanted to hear Murkowski-bashing, I would talk to Tony Knowles, Sarah Palin, or the like. In college, a student’s job is to think, right? A professor should present both sides of an issue, kick it around, and then allow the students to decide for themselves. They should not promote any ideology. I am not partisan, but I am fair. I just wish our professors would be too.

— John H. Roberson III

EDITORIAL RESPONSE
NOVEMBER 7, 2006

With the upcoming vote, the controversial war in Iraq, and the other political events facing our nation, political discussion naturally occurs in classes around campus.

College is a time for many young men and women to find themselves, their beliefs, and their values. The problem is that some students feel as if their opinions cannot be shared during class discussion for fear of being looked down upon or ridiculed by their professors.

Last week, our Seawolf Snapshot question was, “Do you vote?” Shortly after one of the interviews, one of the students came into the office and asked that we not publish her comment. Her reasoning: She knows that her professor has a differing opinion and thinks her grade would suffer because of it.

A November 2004 report, “Politics in the Classroom,” reveals that nearly a third of students at 50 top U.S. universities thought their grades were affected by political bias on the part of professors, according to the American Council of Trustees and Alumni. The report found that 29 percent of respondents agreed with the statement, “On my campus, there are courses in which students feel they have to agree with the professor’s political or social views in order to get a good grade.”

While research of this sort has not been conducted at UAA, the situation has the potential to become a problem. In politically focused classes, it is understandable for students to have varying

views and opinions. In fact, good debate is a necessary component for learning in these classes. But what about English, history, or even math classes where politics get brought into the picture?

Some of *The Northern Light's* staff members have seen what could be considered political discrimination on campus, such as a liberal arts professor who made his political views perfectly clear, explicitly saying that conservative students don't really belong in his class. Or a history professor who continually went off on tangents ridiculing a political party, and if a student who identified with that party tried to make a reply, that student would get a sarcastic rebuttal, a criticizing speech, and a quick return to the actual lecture. Or an A student who suddenly got a C after writing something against the professor's political view.

At Duke University, a history professor on the first day of class made a joking remark about having prejudices against Republicans, not even considering that some of his students might take

offense, according to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. The Feb. 13, 2004 article goes on to mention that many conservative students feel a kind of isolation and discrimination on campuses that seem dominated by professors with outspoken liberal views.

Even if professors' personal views don't influence their grading of students, it is easy to see how students could get the impression that their political views may affect their grades. A recently published letter to the *Northern Light* from John H. Roberson III, a student government senator, expressed his concerns about political bias in the classroom. "I have had it with politically biased professors at UAA," he wrote. "In an upper-division political science class,

students spent an hour bashing Gov. Frank Murkowski. At the end of class, I said, 'This is ridiculous, and even worse, it's not educational.' The professor replied, 'I thought it was educational.'"

If a professor brings a political conversation into discussion, especially in a class where such a topic is not specifically relevant, all students should be entitled to their own opinions without fear of repercussions. Discussing an issue in class should be a learning experience for students in which all sides of an argument can be fairly represented without fear. It should not be an exercise in political indoctrination by professors who consider their classes a personal soapbox.

We are paying to sit in class and learn. We are not paying to have our professors scare us into conformity in an effort to get a better grade. Our grades should reflect the work we all do for our classes, not how well our views mesh with our professors'.

Even though most professors will say they don't let personal views interfere with students' grades, continually bringing up one's political views in class will certainly give the appearance of political bias, which can only have a stifling effect on students' self-expression.

Again, this is not a widespread problem at UAA, yet. But we live in politically volatile times, and there are strong opinions on all sides of the issues. To keep it from becoming a problem, professors prone to spewing partisan digressions should keep to the lecture at hand and leave their political speeches and jokes at home.

Aaron Burkhart
The Northern Light

The *Northern Light* editorial was based on the firsthand experiences of our staff. We used the ACTA report to support our findings, but we in no way took up their cause or viewpoint. We wrote our own viewpoint and then were happily surprised to find out we weren't the only ones feeling this way.

Aaron Burkhart

FACULTY RESPONSE

An edited version of this essay appeared in the Northern Light on December 5, 2006. The following is Dr. Kline's complete response.

Free Speech, Academic Responsibility, and Politics in the Classroom

Dr. Daniel T. Kline

*Associate Professor of English
University of Alaska Anchorage*

Readers of the *Northern Light* should be aware of the partisan nature of the editorial “Partisan Politics Have No Place in the Classroom” and of the partisan rationale underlying many of the specific comments. I’m afraid to say that, in the guise of arguing on behalf of students, the *Northern Light* has uncritically taken sides in a developing political battle over higher education curriculum. The editorial rests upon several mistaken assumptions concerning the management of the higher education classroom, the role and authority of faculty, and the nature of the educational interaction. It also mobilizes faulty logic and scare tactics to vastly inflate the extent of the problem.

First and most importantly, free speech is the essential condition of any higher education classroom. University of Alaska President Mark Hamilton affirmed this in no uncertain terms in a letter to faculty and staff, dated 13 March 2001, written in response to several politically controversial events in the UA system:

A number of recent events has convinced me [to] take the unusual step to state clearly and unambiguously what all of us would take as a given — The University of Alaska acknowledges and espouses the right to freedom of speech....What I want to make clear and unambiguous is that responses to complaints or demand for action regarding constitutionally guaranteed freedoms of speech CANNOT BE QUALIFIED [emphasis Hamilton’s]...Opinions expressed by our employees, students, faculty, or administrators don’t have to be politic or polite. However personally offended we might be, however unfair the association of the University to the opinion might be, I insist that we remain a certain trumpet on this most precious of Constitutional rights.

President Hamilton is to be applauded for his uncompromising support for freedom of speech, especially in a time when many universities are rolling back, constraining, and otherwise curtailing free speech for students and faculty and when other schools are considering the institution of draconian measures to monitor, police, and otherwise constrain faculty prerogatives in the classroom.

Second, there is no distinction between free speech and impolite or impolitic speech (that is, speech that one might disagree with or even find offensive). This is crucial. One should not confuse the right to free speech with the desire not to be offended, challenged, or countermanded. One who speaks freely should instead be ready with a response to an opposing viewpoint. Mr. Roberson, who was offended by an hour-long discussion concerning Gov. Frank Murkowski in an upper-division political science class, did indeed have the right—and took the opportunity—to state his opinion about that discussion. Mr. Roberson seems to have mistaken being offended with being silenced,

humiliated, or somehow harassed, but from the brief coverage in the *Northern Light*, he appears to have exercised his right to free speech. If Mr. Roberson, or any other student, disagrees with anything a faculty member or another student says, that student has every right (and I would argue, even the personal responsibility) to speak up and articulate a differing viewpoint. Although I do not think that many faculty members set out to deliberately offend anybody, every student has the right to be

offended in the classroom and to speak up if and when they disagree. This is qualitatively different from saying that faculty or other students should be silenced if one disagrees with them.

There is no distinction between free speech and impolite or impolitic speech (that is, speech that one might disagree with or even find offensive). This is crucial. One should not confuse the right to free speech with the desire not to be offended, challenged, or countermanded.

Third, managing the classroom, facilitating discussion, and creating an educational environment are the faculty member's responsibility; it is not a student's right to determine what is taught in the classroom nor is it a student's responsibility to decide how the material is presented. Faculty members are selected by their peers on the basis of their disciplinary expertise and suitability for the departmental mission. In Roberson's example, the faculty member in question believed the discussion concerning Gov. Murkowski to be educational; Mr. Roberson disagreed. This is as it should be. Evidently, other students in the classroom who carried on the conversation found it to be beneficial, and the faculty member agreed. This too is as it should be. It is the faculty member's prerogative to pursue discussion as s/he sees fit.

The *Northern Light's* thinking about class content and conduct is muddled at this point. The editorial states that "In politically focused classes, it is understandable for students to have varying views and opinions" and opines that "good debate is a necessary component for learning in these classes." Yet the writer summons as its only UAA example a student who was offended by discussion about a politician in an upper-division political science course? It seems to me that an upper-division political science course is exactly the place where a politician could be profitably discussed.

Put bluntly and impolitely, the classroom is under the purview of the faculty member, and a student has no more right to hijack the discussion than a faculty member has to create a harassing environment. That Mr. Roberson disagreed, complained, and wrote about the incident clearly indicates that he was in no way "indoctrinated," and nothing in the letter indicates that the faculty member created a harassing atmosphere. In fact, in registering his dissent, Mr. Roberson proved the importance, and exercised the freedom, of free speech in the classroom. By the same token, simply because a student has an opinion about a subject does not mean that that opinion must be granted the same weight in the classroom.

Fourth, and closely allied to the previous point, the editorial states somewhat peremptorily, "What about English, history, or even math classes where politics get brought into the picture?" The implication here is, of course, that politics have no place in these courses. There are several problems with this narrow view of politics and of academia.

Every discipline has its own history of development that is, by definition, politically fraught; each discipline develops through disagreement, often vehement and impolite disagreement. In other words, the classroom is already a political space, a fact that may be well known to faculty but transparent to

students. It doesn't make any more sense to say that faculty should leave their political opinions at the door than it would to require students to keep their mouths shut if they disagree.

Disagreement and dissension are often as important to educational development as placid acquiescence or simple concurrence. Generally, the sciences have the scientific method to confirm fact and control quality (and the scientific method is not democratic or politically correct), while the humanities have reasoned argument (sometimes passionate argument both pro and con). What that means is that a faculty member may use examples from current politics, popular culture, political analysis and many other venues to illuminate some aspect of a course topic, whatever the course. While it may not be immediately evident to a student what the purpose of such a comparison might be, it is as much the student's responsibility to ascertain the connections as it is the faculty member's to make and clarify them.

In other words, learning is often hard work, and in contrast to the *Northern Light's* assertion that "We are paying to sit in class and learn," simply sitting in class is not the same thing as learning (the "bank account" model of education). One doesn't have to agree with a faculty member or fellow student to have learned from either of them, and one can often learn as much by disagreeing and exploring the reasons for that disagreement. That does not, however, require that a faculty member do that thinking for the student. Sometimes the classroom is as much a crucible of fire as it is an oasis of plenty—ask any law student who is pushed to the limits under Socratic questioning in court, or any medical student who is pressed for a diagnosis and prognosis during rounds, or any number of undergraduate majors who have to pass a high-stakes exit or professional exam to get their degrees.

Fifth, the *Northern Light* glibly summons the American Council of Trustees and Alumni's November 2004 report, "Politics in the Classroom," as evidence that one third of American students (at 50 top universities) believe their grades are influenced by their professors' political biases. What the editors fail to reflect upon is the political agenda of ACTA, allied associations like Students for Academic Freedom, and David Horowitz's so-called Academic Bill of Rights. By citing ACTA's "study" as if it were neutral and authoritative, the *Northern Light* has already taken sides in an ongoing national political effort (whether knowingly or not) that has caused significant further disruption in university classrooms across America.

An example of ACTA's activities will illustrate the overall political aim of this group founded by Lynne V. Cheney (wife of Vice President Dick Cheney). ACTA issued a report after 9/11 entitled "Defending Civilization: How Our Universities are Failing America," written by Jerry L. Martin and Anne D. Neal. Calling academia "the weak link in America's response to the attack," Martin and Neal decry the "shocking divide between academe and the public at large," deprecate those who did not "follow the President in calling evil by its rightful name," and condemn those who "pointed accusatory fingers, not at the terrorists, but at America itself." The opening denouncement is then followed by more than 100 quotations, many by name, from American academics who question, with varying proportions of analysis and vehemence,



For more on ACTA, Students for Academic Freedom, and the Academic Bill of Rights, see page 206 and the following websites:
<http://www.goacta.org>
<http://www.studentsforacademicfreedom.org>
<http://www.FrontPageMagazine.com>
<http://chronicle.com>
<http://www.insidehighered.com>

American complicity in the events leading up to the 9/11 attacks. Martin and Neal's conclusion: "Indeed, the message of much of academe was clear: BLAME AMERICA FIRST."

Their solution is to reinvigorate American education in a specific, politically loaded way:

"We call upon all colleges and universities to adopt strong core curricula that include rigorous, broad-based courses on the great works of Western civilization as well as courses on American history, America's founding documents, and America's continuing struggle to extend and defend the principles on which it was founded. If institutions fail to do so, alumni should protest, donors should fund new programs, and trustees should demand action."

ACTA's aim is therefore to reduce freedom of inquiry, especially when it's impolitic or impolite, in favor of a politically approved curriculum that institutionalizes a specific view of American history and culture.

Finally, despite my dismay with the rampant misunderstanding and my disappointment with the flawed logic of the editorial, I do agree with one specific overriding concern. Students who believe

Students who have a complaint against a faculty member can and should pursue the matter: first through informal contact with the faculty member and then, if necessary, through official institutional channels.

they have a complaint against a faculty member can and should pursue the matter: first through informal contact with the faculty member and then, if necessary, through official institutional channels. Much more often than not, faculty members are more than willing to discuss student concerns and accommodate reasonable requests. They are no more interested in picking a fight or making their students unhappy than the students are with parroting views they don't agree with just to please a teacher.

If I were to stoop to the kind of fear-mongering that the editorial uses when it suggests "this is not a widespread problem at UAA, yet," indicating that the liberal professor bogeyman is out there just waiting to pounce upon unsuspecting and innocent conservative students (as David Horowitz and his allies suggest), I'd say that external political intervention into the higher education classroom isn't a widespread problem at UAA (cue

ominous music now)—yet. But it could be if people other than faculty begin to decide what faculty can say and how they can say it. At UAA, the faculty has control over the curriculum: we propose it, we review it, we interview, hire, and promote those who will teach it. Peer review is the heart of the academic enterprise, and I don't know a faculty member who is not committed to this principle.

I am in no way dismissing harassment or hostility, which is clearly defined and fairly dealt with here at UAA. Students who feel harassed or otherwise threatened in class have clear and reasonable options for dealing with those behaviors, in the same way faculty have resources to deal with hostile or disruptive students. But active disagreement in the classroom, even when keenly felt, is in many ways something to be recognized rather than feared and channeled rather than censored, for as President Hamilton's letter states: "Attempts to assuage anger or to demonstrate concern by qualifying our support for free speech serve to cloud what must be a clear message. There is nothing to check into, nothing to investigate."

Free speech must remain the hallmark of higher education, and if the *Northern Light* cannot support that principle, then I submit that its priorities are misplaced and its concerns misguided. More than nearly any other institution on campus, it seems to me, a newspaper ought to support free speech in all forms.

STUDENT/FACULTY FORUM

Professor Jenkins organized a structured discussion between faculty and students about the appropriateness of teachers expressing their political and religious views in the classroom. This essay is a reflection on the planning, execution, and outcome of that event.

Fostering Understanding through Faculty/Student Dialogue

Dr. Patricia Jenkins

*Associate Professor of English
University of Alaska Anchorage*

In the spring semester, in response to the issues raised by the letter, the editorial, and the rebuttal, we held a faculty/student discussion on whether and how we should bring politics and religion into the classroom. Announcements went out over email and the university's daily electronic newsletter, posing several questions for participants to consider: Do professors have the right to make their political positions clear in class? What about classes where politics is not the overt content? Is there no place for politics in classes like math and English?

We convened a five-member panel to present a range of viewpoints. Daniel Kline, Aaron Burkhart, and John Roberson were joined by Assistant Professor of Aviation Technology Michael Buckland and Dean of Students Bruce Schultz. The two students were leaders of student government and media. The two faculty were openly political (their political biases no secret to their students) but from opposite sides of the spectrum. Bruce served as a mediating force, someone who functions as a spokesperson for both student and faculty rights in the classroom.

We sent out two discussion scenarios ahead of time, asking participants to think about the issues these stories raised and to be prepared to discuss them in the forum. The first scenario described a hypothetical English professor who expressed her left-leaning politics overtly in the classroom and who used her own editorial on the war in Iraq as the basis of an in-class discussion. The second described a hypothetical science professor who expressed his religious beliefs in the classroom and who, in the week before final exams, led an optional after-class meeting entitled "Evidence of God in Human Physiology."

At the beginning of the forum, one of the moderators read a statement asking everyone present to behave respectfully and considerately:

During the discussion tonight, statements may be made that you deem offensive. Please be respectful of others and agree that you will not deliberately offend. While it is certainly acceptable to state your opinions and to disagree with others, we ask that you try to respond in a manner that will not offend, intimidate or disparage others, and we ask that you try not to interrupt others or insult anyone personally. If, in fact, your manner causes offense, we encourage you to apologize.

We sent out two discussion scenarios ahead of time, asking participants to think about the issues these stories raised and to be prepared to discuss them in the forum.

Each panelist delivered a two-minute prepared statement, followed by a brief reaction to one of the scenarios. Next, the audience formed dyads to discuss the scenarios or panelist comments among themselves. Finally, panel members and audience participated in a moderated discussion, with the two moderators asking questions, prompting responses, and providing conversational guidance as necessary.

Scenario #1: Politics

English professor Dr. Irene Crenshaw is openly political. She has an Amnesty International sticker on her office door, next to bumper stickers reading “No Millionaire Left Behind” and “Bush’s Last Day: 01-20-09.” She has spoken out in class against the No Child Left Behind program, and she had a commentary published in the *Anchorage Daily News* on the anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Furthermore, she helps to organize peace demonstrations and was recently seen waving a poster on the corner of Lake Otis and 36th Avenue, just down the street from the western end of the university campus. Clearly, she is opposed to U.S. involvement in Iraq. Clearly, her politics lean to the left.

As an assignment in her English 311 (Advanced Composition) class, Dr. Crenshaw has asked her students to evaluate a U.S. policy, issue, or action. Here is an excerpt from the assignment:

The focus for this assignment is on evaluation—that is, on deciding about the quality of an existing policy, issue, or action. When writers offer an evaluation of something, they are offering an analysis and basing that analysis on criteria. Generally speaking, in your essay, you are answering one or more of the following questions:

- *Is something beneficial or harmful?*
- *Is something good, better, or best?*
- *Should it stay or go?*
- *Should it be revised?*
- *Should it be avoided?*
- *Should it be experienced?*
- *What is the value or significance of something?*

More specifically, you are telling the audience not only that something is beneficial (or whatever), but you are also telling the audience why something is beneficial (or whatever). The “whys” are the criteria.

At the start of class on Tuesday, Dr. Crenshaw described her recent experience organizing and participating in the peace demonstration. She made several references about wishing she could move to Canada, and she asked the class if they liked the new sticker on her door about Bush’s last day. The class was scheduled to discuss their ideas for the essay that day, and Dr. Crenshaw had them practice their evaluation skills by discussing the merits of her recent editorial on the war in Iraq. She believes—and has made this clear to her students—that in a course like this, it is her job to challenge students’ thinking and to mold responsible citizens who participate in the political process.

Discussion of Scenario 1: Politics

For the first scenario, discussion focused on the assignment and the instructor's behavior in the classroom rather than her political activism outside the classroom. Some felt that the assignment was a problem, given the overtly political classroom context she so regularly provided. Others disagreed. A faculty member commented that she probably didn't welcome divergent opinions. Another suggested that students should take risks and engage in the battles offered by such situations.

But taking a risk with a teacher like this, said several students, could mean sacrificing their grade point average. For some, this wasn't acceptable:

- *"If a student doesn't care about their grade, that's one thing. But for a good grade, we will agree with the teacher."*
- *"Taking a risk is detrimental to students. It's better to fall in line."*
- *"How many of these battles do we have to fight? Grades do matter. We want to go to grad school. Sometimes it's just better to shut up and get an A."*

A faculty member wondered if teachers like the hypothetical Dr. Crenshaw might shut students down in class, contributing to their lack of trust and thus fear of speaking up during class discussion. Students made it clear that this was indeed a possible consequence:

- *"Power relations have to be considered. The student with an opposing opinion won't want to speak out."*
- *"The professor doesn't realize how easy it is to drive students away. Even when teachers say they won't be biased, I don't trust them."*
- *"Going up against a professor like this could be a problem."*

Overall, we got mixed reactions about whether or not this professor crossed the line. Technically, perhaps, she didn't: she didn't insist that students represent particular viewpoints. But everyone smelled the potential for trouble.

I think the participants—particularly students—valued a panel that included faculty members from both ends of the political perspective. Many expect all faculty members to be liberal and are surprised to discover that a conservative faculty member even exists.

Scenario #2: Religion

Dr. Dexter Snicknej, an assistant professor of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation at Wasilla University, directs its Human Performance Laboratory. He also teaches exercise physiology, his specialty, to graduate and undergraduate students and supervises research problems and theses.

Dr. Snicknej occasionally refers to his religious beliefs during instructional time, remarks that he prefaces as “personal bias.” Some of his references make clear his understanding of the creative force behind human physiology. In the context of these discussions, he has commented negatively on the mandatory teaching of evolution in public schools. When asked how he handles the academic stresses of research, publishing, promotion, and tenure, Dr. Snicknej has suggested to students that his religious beliefs are more important than academic production, and that’s what helps him cope. He never engages in prayer, reads passages from the Bible, hands out religious tracts, or arranges for guest speakers to lecture on religious topics during instructional time.

Dr. Snicknej is regarded as an excellent professor and was recommended for early tenure. Course evaluations demonstrate he is a capable teacher. He also has an excellent record of publishing, having authored or co-authored more published articles in journals related to his academic discipline than any other assistant professor in the area of health, physical education, and recreation at the university.

Near the end of last semester, he organized an optional after-class meeting for his students and other interested persons during which he lectured on and discussed “Evidences of God in Human Physiology.” Discussion covered various aspects of the human body including the complexity of its design and operation, concluding that man was created by God and was not the byproduct of evolution. The meeting was attended by five students and one professor.

Students complained that the timing of the meeting before final exams created the possibility of a coercive effect. Attendance was voluntary, however, and did not affect grades, as the professor used a blind grading system. Nevertheless, students brought their complaints to the department chair, who brought it to the dean, who drafted a memorandum instructing Dr. Snicknej to refrain from “1) the interjection of religious beliefs and/or preferences during instructional time periods and 2) the optional classes where a ‘Christian perspective’ of an academic topic is delivered.”

Dr. Snicknej’s efforts to have the order rescinded were unsuccessful. The university, upon the advice of counsel, advised him that, as owner of the teaching facilities, the university has the right to establish curriculum and that it had not improperly interfered with academic freedom. The order remains in effect, and Dr. Snicknej has complied with it.

Discussion of Scenario 2: Religion

The second scenario did not generate as much discussion as the first one. Most participants felt that religion didn’t belong in the classroom, but many also thought the hypothetical university overreacted when it instructed the professor to refrain from discussing his religious beliefs in or out of class. The voluntary nature of the after-school meeting and the fact that the professor used a

blind review for evaluation were seen as mitigating factors in this case. Someone remarked that he wasn't surprised the university would take action against this particular professor since conservative Christians are not politically correct in the university setting. Others felt that religion was a grayer area than politics, more difficult to understand, and easier to misconstrue. As one participant put it, "There's much more at stake with religion."

The teachers seemed less uncomfortable with the thought of religion in the classroom, particularly when it is the student who introduces it. One said that a student's religion can be a way to connect with that student. Another talked about featuring Plato's seven core virtues in a lecture. Both seemed to suggest that religion—and values associated with religion—have an inevitable presence and that this can make for teaching moments, not necessarily opportunities to proselytize or shut down those who think differently from the professor.

Evaluation of the Forum

By all measures, the forum accomplished our primary goal of fostering understanding among faculty and students about the role of politics in the classroom. The evidence comes in the form of participant evaluations as well as several follow-up conversations. Five things stand out as being particularly important to the event's success.

Selection of Panel Members. Even though the overt sharing of political views was neither a requirement nor a feature of the forum discussion, I think the participants—particularly students—valued a panel that included faculty members from both ends of the political spectrum. Many expect all faculty members to be liberal and are surprised to discover that a conservative faculty member even exists. I think some came to this event expecting the discussion to be about conservative students vs. liberal faculty members, but Professor Buckland's participation defused that tension and gave us a necessary balance that allowed the conversations to go deeper. Furthermore, the panel included student leaders who had already made themselves heard on these questions. The representative nature of the panel reinforced several key messages: 1) multiple voices do exist at UAA, even among faculty members; 2) these multiple voices can and do respect one another; and 3) student voices matter as well.

Opportunity for Audience Participation. Participants welcomed the opportunity to voice their opinions and to engage in discussion with the panelists and each other. To make sure that all voices had the chance to be heard, we used a modified Critical Incident Questionnaire on our evaluation form, asking participants to respond in writing to two questions:

- Was there a moment or incident during the forum that stands out in your mind as particularly significant or engaging? Please describe it, and tell us why you feel this way.

The discussion was able to move beyond simple venting to address larger concerns, and it suggested to faculty members that students may be keeping some very important thoughts to themselves.

- Do you care to make a comment to any panel participants, members of the audience, or moderators, perhaps a comment that you did not think of during the forum or a comment that you did not share during the forum, but would like to share now?

I was surprised at the degree to which students believed they had to give instructors what they want in order to get a good grade. In the end, despite my protestations that I tried to create a classroom where political differences were recognized, encouraged, and seen as a fruitful means of fostering dialogue, I found that many students simply were intimidated by the prospect of having to articulate a position and defend it against other students or, especially, a faculty member—even if that faculty member was simply playing the devil’s advocate.

Dan Kline
English

Preparedness of Panel. Our strategy of asking panelists to reflect on the scenarios ahead of time resulted in an articulate panel that audience members appreciated. Panelists were able to frame the questions effectively as preface to a substantive, meaningful discussion among all participants.

Respectful, Safe Atmosphere. Participants valued the respectful, safe atmosphere of the forum, achieved in spite of political differences and the sensitive nature of the topics. Students willingly admitted to practices their teachers would find disappointing (such as pleasing their teachers by adopting their viewpoints), and faculty members challenged them about doing so. Participants were able to move the discussion beyond simple venting to address larger concerns, and faculty members learned that students may be keeping some very important thoughts to themselves.

Timeliness of Topic. Both faculty and students expressed an interest in this topic, both before and after the forum. It was covered in the campus newspaper and I also consulted with members of the UAA Union of Students who felt that this was an important and much needed discussion. Before the forum, I emailed some faculty members, asking them to encourage their students to attend. I received quite a few

responses from them about how much such a discussion is needed. The timeliness provided an incentive for attending, but it also provided a purpose for the forum.

It is clear from evaluation forms that the majority of participants found the event to be successful. All but one participant agreed or strongly agreed that the forum helped to foster understanding about the issue of politics in the classroom. Virtually everyone agreed that it would be worth holding again. My own criteria for success included the requirement that all voices should be heard. Accordingly, three types of opportunities were provided for participants to be heard—small group discussions, large group discussions, and the evaluation form, where participants were encouraged to make anonymous comments. If anyone left who did not feel heard or understood, then, for me, the forum would not have been a success.

As I reflected on it later, however, other questions seemed worth considering. What did participants learn? Did anyone change his or her mind? At least one person felt the forum was not a success, and I wonder if this person was hoping for a different kind of resolution. Perhaps this person was a faculty member who wanted students to change their behaviors and attitudes toward overtly political moments in the classroom. Perhaps it was a student who wanted teachers to change *their* attitudes and behaviors and stop being overtly political in the classroom. Because the evaluation forms were anonymous, I'll never know.

My own opinion is that discussions can be successful even if they don't necessarily resolve anything, that satisfaction comes from being heard and, perhaps, understood. Students were challenged to see politics in the classroom as a learning opportunity rather than a threat or a reason to fall in line with the professor's politics. Professors were made aware of the resistance students have to taking risks in the name of a learning opportunity.

Did anyone change his or her mind? Probably not, but that's OK, at least from my professor's perspective. Participants were honest and sincere. A lot of opinions weren't just voiced—they were also heard.



Student/Faculty Forum

A strategy for engaging multiple voices on an issue of mutual concern.

Selecting Panelists

Try to find people who are already engaged in, or experts on, your topic, and who represent different constituencies and points of view.

Ground rules

Clearly state the purpose of your discussion and your ground rules for participating in it. Participants should agree to be respectful of each other, and not to insult, intimidate, interrupt, or disparage others.

Opening statements

Give each panelist a few minutes to make an opening statement.

Hypothetical scenarios

Describe a hypothetical scenario, and ask each panelist to respond to it. Give them the scenarios ahead of time to ensure thoughtful responses.

Audience participation

Break the group up into dyads, and invite participants to react to what they've heard. Then bring them back to the larger group and lead a facilitated discussion. Provide opportunity for anonymous written comments as well to be sure that all voices can be heard.

STUDENT MEDIA ADVISER

Most professors would defend their own freedom of speech in the classroom, that almost sacrosanct space faculty should be afforded to present ideas, political or otherwise. But what about the student media? Do students, including student journalists, have (or should they have) the same freedoms of expression as faculty members on college campuses? Are these freedoms at risk? And if they are at risk, what is the student media's role in engaging in difficult dialogues on college campuses? This essay explores the role of a student media advisor in light of recent Supreme Court and appellate court rulings, especially the 2005 *Hosty v. Carter* and the 2007 *Morse v. Frederick* cases.

You are Free to Reject my Advice

Paola Banchemo

Assistant Professor of Journalism and Public Communications

Faculty adviser, the Northern Light

University of Alaska Anchorage

The letter to the editor of the *Northern Light* and the subsequent editorial and response served as an example of the generally respectful relationship between UAA's student newspaper and the students, staff, faculty and administrators they cover. Too often, in other cases, college media become a source of controversy, and powerful people on campus are sometimes threatened enough to try to turn off the spigot by regulating the expression of students and student journalists.

John Roberson's letter to the editor prompted a discussion in the newsroom. Roberson was a well-known, politically conservative student who would later become student body president. Some *Northern Light* staff members agreed with him that instructors inappropriately voiced political viewpoints in their classrooms, and several thought they also marked students down for disagreeing with them. Others had seen no evidence of this. But enough editors thought Roberson's concerns had merit that Executive Editor Aaron Burkhart and another staff member set about to write an editorial maintaining that a professor's political bias could create a hostile environment. The whole staff read the editorial, and it ran with no strong dissension. Unsigned editorials are supposed to represent the consensus views of the paper's editors, but they rarely do so perfectly.

The commentary from Dr. Kline arrived soon after. The piece was approximately three times longer than the standard American Op-Ed piece of about 750 words and about six times longer than the typical letter published in the *Northern Light*. The editor had the option of publishing it as a Soapbox submission, which exists as a forum for anyone in the community—faculty, legislators, citizens, etc.—to publish lengthier commentary. But he chose not to, based on his desire to reserve Soapbox for opinions that hadn't yet been aired in the paper. He then worked with Professor Kline to shorten the piece, waiving the usual 350-word limit on letters to the editor.

This was editing, not disciplining, and an appropriate way to manage the space reserved for news and opinion in the paper. I might have allowed Professor Kline's piece to run as a Soapbox commentary myself, but it would still have needed editing. I backed the editor's choice and position. The *Northern Light* wants diverse commentary, but it also wants pieces that are manageable in length. This is a policy consistent with any newsroom.

Advising Student Journalists

This incident is typical of my relationship with the campus newspaper. The students employed at the *Northern Light* decide the what, when, where, how, and why of its content. As their faculty adviser, I provide ideas, suggestions, and even reprimands when I spot holes in coverage after the paper has been published. But it's up to the students to come up with the content and set editorial policies. The newspaper is not a classroom, but even if it were, I would not read or edit articles prior to their publication without a student journalist making content decisions. My role is to advise, nothing more and nothing less.

I support students' First Amendment rights by having no direct say on content. Advisers to newspapers and broadcast outlets at public universities are guided by the established standards of our profession, expressed in the College Media Advisers' Code of Ethics: "Student media must be free from all forms of external interference designed to regulate its content."¹ Our common refrain is "You are free to reject my advice." Sure, we'd like students to follow through on our suggestions. But we also expect the student media to provide a forum for the expression of opinions and points of view that may be in opposition to established university or administrative policy and even at odds with the opinions of the paper's or the station's own staff. Students (at public institutions at least) must have sole responsibility for a publication's content because the student media are essential to a university community in a democracy.

I support students' First Amendment rights by having no direct say on content.

Student Rights of Free Expression

These issues—student rights of free expression and the responsibility of student media to provide public forums on college campuses—are by no means settled in law or the courts. A recent example is the 2005 U.S. Court of Appeals decision in *Hosty v. Carter*, which said subsidized student newspapers could be controlled by school administrators—a framework that has applied to high school papers for 20 years. It's not just a case about newspaper censorship, though. Any school-sponsored student expressive activity—ranging from student-selected speakers to theatrical productions to the press—could be subject to censorship under the standard set by the Seventh Circuit. That's part of the reason the Illinois Legislature recently passed a law that prohibits school officials from exercising prior restraint—the ability to view content and censor it before it is published. *Hosty* is just one in a series of court rulings stretching back more than 20 years that have frustrated the First Amendment rights of students at the high school and college levels. The Illinois law is just one example of a response to what advisers and journalism educators see as a slide in the rights afforded college students.

A high point in freedom of expression for students came in the 1960s. At the height of the Vietnam War, the Supreme Court affirmed the right of high school and junior high school students to wear black armbands to school to signal their opposition to the war. The majority opinion stated that students and teachers do not "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gates." Since then, however, several court rulings have narrowed the rights students have to free expression and speech.

¹ <http://www.collegemedia.org>

Those who advise college media are waiting for the case that tests whether the Supreme Court upholds the right of public university students to decide their papers' content, or goes down a path that restricts student freedom of expression. A clue to the worrisome way in which some judges think surfaced in the opinion of Associate Justice Clarence Thomas in *Morse v. Frederick*, the 2007 case also known as "Bong Hits 4 Jesus."

For those who don't remember, in the spring of 2004, the Olympic torch was relayed through the streets of Juneau, Alaska, on its way to open the Games in Salt Lake City. Juneau/Douglas High School Principal Deborah Morse released students to watch the event from across the street. As the

EXCERPT FROM THE CODE OF ETHICS OF THE COLLEGE MEDIA ADVISERS

"Student media must be free from all forms of external interference designed to regulate its content.... In public institutions, the law is quite clear on guaranteeing broad freedom of expression to the students. In private institutions, media advisers should aid in developing governing documents and working with administrative guidelines which foster a free and open atmosphere for students involved in campus media work, if such freedoms do not currently exist."

College Media Advisers
www.collegemedia.org

torch went by, a group of students including Joseph Frederick unfurled a large banner that read "Bong Hits 4 Jesus," hoping the provocative but nonsensical statement would get them on television. When Principal Morse directed them to take the banner down, Frederick refused. Morse confiscated the banner and later suspended Frederick. The school superintendent and the school board upheld the suspension. Then Frederick sued, alleging the school board and Morse had violated his First Amendment rights.

When the case made its way to the Supreme Court, five of the nine justices sided with the school district. Justice Thomas went even further with the following observation: "In my view, the history of public education suggests that the First Amendment, as originally understood, does not protect student speech in public schools." His argument looks nostalgically on the period when "teachers taught, and students listened. Teachers commanded, and students obeyed."

Stanley Fish, a law professor at Florida International University and a former college dean, endorsed Thomas' position in his *New York Times* blog last year: "Not only do students not have first amendment rights, they do not have any rights: they don't have the right to express themselves, or have

their opinions considered, or have a voice in the evaluation of teachers, or have their views of what should happen in the classroom taken into account. (And I intend this as a statement about college students as well as high-school students.)"

I find that last statement most disconcerting. If the views of Thomas and Fish prevail, we are all in trouble. I can't train future journalists if they are unable to be full members of our democracy and to act responsibly in executing their First Amendment rights of free expression at a student-run news organization. And if journalists don't have freedom of expression, then future generations of citizens will be saddled with an impoverished understanding of both governmental power and public affairs.

Journalism, Objectivity, and the Classroom

Professors are sometimes accused of trying to indoctrinate students to conform to their political beliefs. What strikes me is how closely that mirrors the accusations leveled at the news media: they, too, are often dismissed for having an unmistakable—read liberal—bias. This kind of public mistrust tends to neuter both professors and journalists, placing largely unfounded suspicions against our genuine efforts to teach and inform.

When media critic Walter Lippmann called his fellow journalists to task for generalizing about people based on cultural and personal biases, he was trying to professionalize journalism. He wanted journalists to remove their blinders to examine issues critically. Objectivity didn't mean that journalists were to give credence to any and all viewpoints. In fact, it has less to do with journalists and much more to do with their work habits. Journalism, Lippmann wrote, should adopt "a common intellectual method and a common area of valid fact." In other words, he wanted journalists to emulate the rationality of the scientific method in their reporting.

Nearly a hundred years later, we live in a time when the most polarizing of figures hold the national spotlight, and when those who practice journalism objectively, in the mold of Lippmann, find their audience narrowing. We live at a time when Michael Moore can present as fact a highly biased and superficial film like *Fahrenheit 9/11* and it can be called a documentary. We live at a time when David Horowitz can attack academic freedom with a

campaign of manipulation, buying advertising space in college newspapers, filling it with provocative content such as "Ten Reasons Why Reparations for Slavery is a Bad Idea," and then watching student journalists squirm. If they run the ads, they'll have outraged readers crying for apologies; if they don't run them, they'll be attacked for their own "assault on free speech."

Professors and journalists both trade in ideas, in knowledge. But people often make up their minds before they gain knowledge. Thus, both professors, who are charged with developing students into citizens, and journalists, who are charged with helping citizens better understand their world, should remember that they are bound to come in for criticism when they try to expand their respective audiences' perspectives. Relying on our biases in the classroom or in the press hurts our cause. Some truths will upset our audience, but we must promote an atmosphere in which discomfort can give way to real understanding. An atmosphere of free expression is the best—indeed, it is the only —place for that.

I can't train future journalists if they are unable to be full-fledged members of our democracy and to act responsibly in executing their First Amendment rights of free expression at a student-run news organization.

It may not be desirable—or even possible—to find professors without ideology or classrooms without politics. But it is possible to hold those ideologies and politics in respectful tension, and to create classrooms and campus events that are safe places in which those ideas can be discussed. This essay outlines a few considerations for creating such spaces.

Making Our Classrooms Safe for Ideas

Dr. Patricia Jenkins

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Aside from the items on our office doors, the buttons we may wear, the letters to the editor we may write, and the after-school activities we may participate in, some teachers among us are also openly political in the classroom. We are “openly political” when we make known our place on the general continuum of conservative to liberal and when we speak openly from this position about ideas, issues, public figures and events, and social and intellectual trends.

The opportunities for being openly political in the classroom abound: through our assignments, in our written and oral responses to student work, and during class discussions. Many of us, in fact,

see just about everything we do as necessarily political, even if it doesn’t always seem so to students, as for example when our viewpoints and positions align themselves with mainstream values. For some of us, much of what we do as teachers is enhanced by the values and ideas that place us somewhere on the general continuum.

When I say that some of us see virtually everything we do as necessarily political, I’m speaking from the perspective of a social-epistemic rhetorician who believes that we cannot know reality apart from language. While reality exists apart from language, it is language—a human construct—that allows us to interact with it. Language does not record reality, nor is it a referent for it. Language is not a transparent medium or a signaling device separate from reality. Language is reality.

Some students claim that they feel intimidated by openly political teachers, and so they align themselves with our viewpoints and positions because they feel that their grades are at stake.

Furthermore, language is always already ideological. In other words, when we use language, we are inevitably political. It isn’t always obvious because what we say may support the dominant ideology and so may seem natural and normal rather than a particular version of reality.

If language is always ideological, and if we use language when we teach, it follows then, as James Berlin puts it, “that a way of teaching is never innocent.” In other words, we teach not only a particular subject matter; we also endorse ideas about the nature of things. Some ways of teaching

are more self-consciously aware of their ideology than others. If some do not seem particularly ideological, it is most likely because the ideology of the class endorses widely accepted values. These are the classes that might seem innocent or neutral.

Regardless of whether students can figure out the ideology of our classrooms, it is clear that many do not find our way of teaching to be innocent. This is especially true for those of us who might be considered openly political. Some students consider politics in the classroom as off topic, irrelevant, and just plain not educational. Others feel intimidated by openly political teachers, aligning themselves with our viewpoints and positions because they think they have to in order to get a desirable grade. As one student put it, disagreeing with the professor is just too risky. As another has said, “I find it frustrating when professors grade my idea instead of how I present it. It makes me hesitant to present ideas that are contrary.”

An Internet search easily provides evidence of how many university students nationwide feel the need to expose and demonize openly political teachers. A quick read of the website *Politics in the Classroom*¹ makes it clear that students see openly political teachers as having intentions to indoctrinate them and perhaps bully them in the process. This website, started by a student in 2004, describes itself as a place where students can anonymously document political comments and actions of professors. Its site administrator claims that opinionated political commentary in nonpolitical classes is often “a deliberate and clear attempt by the teacher to encourage and mold the political minds of the students. Afraid to rebut the teacher’s positions, many students remain silent to protect both their grade and their reputation in the eyes of the teacher.”

A recent posting caught my eye. The student was praising an otherwise “absolutely wonderful” teacher who would “not stop spouting his political rhetoric.”

I suppose if you agree with him you wouldn’t mind. My biggest problem with his bias was that he resorted to name calling about those who might not agree with him. What he didn’t know at the time was that he was referring to 1/2 of his class. Believe me, we spoke about it after each class. He began every class by reading newspaper clippings and mocking those in the article or those who would dare to disagree with his opinions. He would have been one of my favorite teachers if he would have just stepped down from his “bully pulpit” and simply taught the class.

Yes, some openly political teachers do cross a line and may perhaps need to become acquainted with their institution’s policies regarding harassment-free learning environments, as did the teacher in the posting above. But those of us who do not cross that line—that is, those of us with good educational intentions—need to take this seriously before we find ourselves on hiring committees that must consider a candidate’s place on the general continuum rather than his or her fit with our departments.

We don’t bully or intimidate students. We don’t name call or disallow contrary opinions. We don’t ask that they think as we do. We just ask that they think.

¹ <http://www.politicsintheclassroom.com/>

I am among those who believe that the goal of a university education is to provide a liberal education that enables students to think critically and creatively; gives them an understanding of the core ideas that shape the physical, social, cultural, economic, and political world in which they live; enables them to see the connections among seemingly disparate things; and equips them to be lifelong learners. This goal may be at odds with other, more practical (read career-related) ideas about the purpose of a university education, many of which are subscribed to by students.

Paulo Freire and the Banking Concept of Education

Paulo Freire, a native of Brazil who taught many sugar cane workers to read and write in the early 1960s, believed that education could transform illiterate citizens into people who could change society—but only if educators change their teaching styles and use more of what we now refer to as active learning methods. The widely anthologized second chapter of his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* criticizes the typical student-teacher relationship as a passive one in which the teacher tries to fill the students with information as if they are empty containers, an image sometimes referred to as the banking concept of education. In the passive learning model that he decries, “Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat.”

I am also among those who believe that by providing students with a liberal education we are serving society. As educator Stephen Rosenstone put it:

“Civil societies are served by universities that produce citizens who think and reason, who raise questions, who can critically evaluate alternative arguments and proposals, who are deliberate and reflective. Civil societies are served by citizens whose minds have been opened to multiple points of view and who are prepared to engage in thoughtful debate.”

Many of us, then, feel that it’s OK to be openly political in the interests of providing a liberal education and serving society. We feel that students and society benefit not so much from our particular views but rather from knowing how and why we arrived at them and how they connect with our discipline and our identities (as a professor of English, for example). We don’t bully or intimidate students. We don’t name call or disallow contrary opinions. We don’t ask that they think as we do. We just ask that they think.

Given the concern for the wrong sort of politics in the university, the kind that would require political balance in departments (see also discussion of ABOR, page 206), I would like to suggest several things so that we can make our classrooms safe for ideas.

Consider our audience. Young students may be clinging to beliefs handed down from their parents and communities; their viewpoints and positions may be underexposed and still forming. Others may not be

comfortable with active disagreement; it might feel disrespectful for them to disagree with the professor or each other in the class. Some may have completely different ideas about the purpose of a university education, and many probably expect what Paulo Freire refers to as the “banking concept” approach. Furthermore, most of them may be largely unaware of the histories, agendas, scopes, and methodologies of our disciplines. We shouldn’t assume that they share our understand-

ing about and passion for what we do and why we do it; nor should we assume that they understand that disciplines have different ways of making knowledge. Our ways may be a new world order for them.

Think—and teach—differently about facts vs. opinions. Americans tend to have a bad view of opinions and a good view of facts. Many go so far as to claim that opinions have no place in argument at all. You can sometimes stop a conversation cold just by saying, ‘Well, that’s just your opinion.’ The implication is that opinions aren’t very important: facts are verifiable and belong to everybody, while opinions are unverifiable and belong only to individuals. Ancient rhetoricians, however, valued opinions and understood them as shared by many members of a community. We also might understand them as shared values rather than features of a person’s identity. This understanding makes opinions both important and valid, though obviously still open to challenge and to change. Argument becomes a matter of challenging the dominant opinion or defending the minority opinion, not by attacking or defending a person’s personality or character but by questioning or asserting values, beliefs, and practices of our communities.

Contextualize our viewpoints and positions. If we teach that opinions represent values shared by members of a community, then we should contextualize them. In other words, when we decide to be openly political, we could also openly connect ourselves to a particular community. I may speak, for example, as a woman who grew up in a Catholic household during the 1950s or as a member of an academic community that rejects creationism as science. Rather than saying, “Politician X is a big fat idiot,” I might say, “As a member of a labor union and strong believer that unions are necessary, I feel that Politician X’s labor policies make the workplace more dangerous. He’s a big fat idiot in the eyes of labor unions!” We should also show students how they can connect their own opinions to community values. This may push them to think on a deeper level — to understand what values they are espousing and rejecting by holding the opinion they do. When placed in the context of shared community values, our openly politically behavior may feel less like a put-down of those who do not agree with us. Students may come to feel that disagreement is less of a personal attack and more of a matter of clashing community values.

Separate the how from the idea. Some students feel that we don’t separate their idea from how they make their arguments. While it may be difficult to consider these two things separately, we can consider what they write or say in a way that privileges the how over the idea. My recommendation for responding to papers and presentations is that we first describe their idea and what they do in their paper or presentation (e.g., “In your paper, you argue x on the basis of x, y, and z. You use



The Questions and Categories exercise is one way to reveal the values that underlie our opinions.



The Identity Groups exercise is one way to make visible the variety of groups individuals may identify with.

thus and such to make your case.”). Then we tell them what their oppositional audiences will react to, construing the audiences in terms of communities. Finally, we suggest what they may consider doing to make their argument effective. This is the difficult part because they may be arguing, in effect, that the sky is purple and the earth is flat. OK. We can tell them what their ideas imply (the sky is not blue and the earth is not round), and we can tell them what they need to establish in order to make that argument.

When we decide to be openly political, we could also openly connect ourselves to a particular community.

Take measures when possible to prevent others from crossing the line. In the spring of 2003, after the U.S. invaded Iraq, several tutors in our Writing Center confided in me that quite a few students broke into tears during tutorials because their English composition instructor had voiced strong opposition to the war during class. The students felt silenced and criticized. As the writing program administrator, I felt compelled to say something to instructors, to tell them that they were out of line somehow. I was torn, however, because I shared their view. I asked myself, how can I tell these people to

shut up already and teach? I needed to strike a balance between their right to freely express their opinions and their obligation to respect all student voices. I decided it was most effective to speak as a community member to other members; this allowed me to speak to values we share. Once I set up the rhetorical situation this way, I was able to write a memo that pointed out their crossing of the line without attacking anyone personally.

Have difficult dialogues about difficult dialogues. Faculty/student forums outside the classroom can shed a lot of light on what’s at issue for students and teachers. After our own forum on politics in the classroom (see page 177), many participants commented that they appreciated most that this conversation took place, which suggests to me that this meta-talk probably does not occur often enough.

MEMO: TO ALL FACULTY TEACHING FIRST YEAR COMPOSITION

I am writing in response to some student complaints: Some students have revealed that they feel uncomfortable in classes when instructors discuss their opposition to a U.S. invasion of Iraq. I do not know which classes or teachers these students have complained about, and I don't plan to find out. I also know that students sometimes misconstrue what we say.

I am not asking you to refrain from expressing your opinion openly, but I am asking you to keep in mind your responsibility to maintain a harassment-free learning environment. According to the *Student Handbook*, "The University of Alaska Anchorage is a community that cherishes the free and open exchange of ideas in the pursuit of knowledge. Maintaining this freedom and openness requires the presence of safety and trust; it requires the absence of coercion, intimidation, and exploitation." Upholding these values can be especially challenging when we feel strongly about something.

My purpose here is not to tell you what to teach, how to dress, or when to speak, but to consider providing an atmosphere in your classrooms defined by tolerance and the free exchange of ideas.

Some teachers have allowed students to write a one-minute anonymous reaction at the end of class as a form of Critical Incident Questionnaire. Here are some example prompts:

- Is there something you would like to add to today's discussion?
- Is there an idea that was not addressed in class today that you feel ought to be heard?

This technique may allow students who feel silenced to speak out, and it may allow you to monitor your ability to maintain a classroom atmosphere defined by tolerance and the free exchange of ideas.

Patricia Jenkins
English

SOCIAL JUSTICE

“Teachers don’t have time to be activists!”

You spend a whole year developing new skills and preparing yourself to engage controversy more effectively, and still it’s possible to be derailed by a point of view you hadn’t considered or a voice you didn’t expect. In the spring, two Education colleagues collaborated on a public presentation of the Mexican documentary film *Granito de arena* (*Grain of Sand*). Their intent was to engage students, faculty, and community members in an exploration of the impact of globalization on public schooling around the world. Although they knew these issues might be controversial in some circles, in this situation they were expecting a thoughtful discussion with a sympathetic audience of like-minded education professionals. Instead, they were blindsided by an audience response that was confrontational and dismissive of the film’s major issues and relevance to public education in the U.S. In this essay, the two discuss their reactions to this event. One of the pair later showed the film to her class of undergraduate students where she got a different response altogether.

A Grain of Sand in Alaska

Dr. Virginia Juettner

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Dr. Diane Erickson

*Assistant Professor of Adult Education
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Throughout our *Difficult Dialogues* training, we were encouraged to think globally but act locally: to help our students connect regional, national, and global issues to their everyday lives and the future of their local communities. Two of us decided to present the documentary film *Granito de arena* (*Grain of Sand*) to prompt a discussion of the impact of globalization on public schooling around the world.

The film tells the story of a decades-long teacher resistance movement in Mexico. As the blurb from Las Americas Film Network puts it: “For over 20 years, global economic forces have been dismantling public education in Mexico, but always in the constant shadow of popular resistance. *Granito de arena* is the story of that resistance—the story of hundreds of thousands of public school teachers whose grassroots, nonviolent movement took Mexico by surprise, and who have endured brutal repression in their 25-year struggle for social and economic justice in Mexico’s public schools.”

The film tackles an array of tough issues, including poverty, the impacts of free-trade agreements between the United States and Mexico, the role of transnational corporations in public schooling, and governmental control of the workforce via privatization of the school system and high-stakes testing. It explores these issues through the lens of public school teachers acting as political activists and advocates for change. We hoped it would serve as the starting point for discussion of education in the United States, the impact of globalization on curriculum and educational outcomes, and the role of the community in shaping the education provided in schools.

The event was scheduled for a late Friday afternoon on the UAA campus, a time when classes are few and parking is easy. It was advertised to the two campus communities via various electronic mailing lists. Colleagues were asked to share it with others who might find it of interest. Despite the email reminders and an advance polling of the education faculty regarding their interest and the most convenient time, fewer than 10 people showed up. The audience included one faculty member, two alumni, several graduate students, and two Anchorage school teachers, both active members of the Anchorage Teachers Union. The lecture hall was large enough to seat 75; the handful of people in attendance scattered themselves throughout the room, two near the back, two near the front, a couple on the left, one or two on the right.

The Lights Went Up.....

When the film ended, we invited the audience to respond. We were hoping for a substantive discussion on globalization and education, but we got something else.

“How do you intend to use this film?” one of the teachers challenged us. “You’re not planning to show it to pre-service teachers, I hope.”

The other teacher agreed. “This is not a good film for pre-service teachers. It will give them the idea that protest marches are the thing to do. But they’re not. They don’t work. They just piss people off.”

Another audience member suggested that because the film was about Mexico, it had no relevance to public education in the United States. “I’d like to help those people down there,” she said. “But our experiences here are completely different.”

Another audience member seemed to sum up the group feeling. “Teachers don’t have time to be activists,” he said.

Our Reactions: A Dialogue

Virginia: Even though I thought I was prepared for controversy, I was stunned by these reactions, especially coming from veteran educators familiar with the issues. After almost two semesters of actively engaging in civil discourse in my classrooms, I lost my objectivity in an instant and became

Even though I thought I was prepared for controversy, I was stunned by these reactions, especially coming from veteran educators familiar with the issues. After almost two semesters actively engaging in civil discourse in my classrooms, I lost my objectivity in an instant and became defensive.

defensive. I replied to the second responder that the civil rights movement successfully demonstrated peaceful protests as a tool for social change. I knew I had lost my stance as an objective moderator, but I just couldn't resist arguing with comments I felt were intended to shut down our discourse. I was especially concerned for my graduate students in the audience, all new pre-service or what I would call 'emerging' teachers. What were they thinking after hearing these opening statements about the film?

Diane: I was embarrassingly at a loss on how to proceed. The reactions were totally unanticipated. I watched Virginia try to turn the tone of the dialogue to a positive note. Despite her thoughtful and articulate redirecting of the comments, the audience was unwilling to engage in a substantive

discussion of either the film or the global forces impacting public education. They did not see the Mexican experience resonating with their own. It seemed neither relevant nor credible to them.

The greatest lesson for me was that I was still the teacher in this space and I should have spent time preparing the audience to engage in discussion.

Virginia: The discussion went on in a similar vein for about 30 minutes, with neither Diane nor I able to turn the tide or draw out any deeper thinking. The strong comments at the beginning had effectively shut down the possibility of going anywhere else with that group. I went home believing that I hadn't succeeded in conducting a deep and rich discussion on this important film and wondering why veteran educators would

suggest censoring it, i.e., restricting its use to practicing educators. It wasn't until much later that

it occurred to me to wonder if one difference between me and them was my participation in this *Difficult Dialogues* project. Perhaps I had become open to a possibility that they had not.

Diane: Upon reflection, I attribute the lack of substantive discussion to my unexamined assumptions about facilitating difficult dialogue in a public venue versus in my classroom. In the classroom I anticipate that students will hold divergent views, and I prepare for discussions accordingly. But I assumed that a public event, being voluntary, would attract like-minded people. My wise APU colleague suggested that we use a brief writing exercise to help participants gather their thoughts after viewing the film, but I overruled that suggestion, and we simply opened the floor instead. I did not prepare questions in advance to prompt dialogue, naively assuming the audience would be in agreement that global forces were undermining the democratic ideals of public education. I thought we would simply have a great and agreeable discussion about the similarities between the two countries and the role of teachers to counteract the global forces.

My second assumption was that people at a public event are time-conscious and anxious to get to the film or the speaker. In the classroom I intentionally devote time to activities that foster positive relations among students and try to create a space that feels safe for open discussion. I assumed the public audience would have little interest or patience for activities to get to know one another or to set the tone of the space. I always ask my students why they are in my class and what they hope to learn. The public group was small enough to have taken time to introduce one another and briefly state our interest in the film and topic, but I didn't do that. If this had been my class, I would have asked students to move closer together. I believe sitting in closer proximity and introductions would

have helped to foster a more civil discourse when the film ended. But again, I didn't do that with the public group.

Third, the opening comment from the audience was fairly aggressive and definitive. It left no room for the kind of discussion I was anticipating. The speaker was in the back row, at the exit, and difficult to see. It occurred to me afterwards that I assume that I have more directive authority in the classroom than in a public event. In the classroom, I exercise it.

Virginia: I, too, assumed that the film would be well received by our audience of professors and practicing teachers, who would easily see parallels between the Mexican education issues and our own No Child Left Behind policies. I assumed that the audience would foster a critical stance and intellectual discussion and that this event would be a safe place for a deep discussion of provocative issues among like-minded colleagues. After all, I knew all but two of the participants. Yet none of these assumptions turned out to be true. I am still not sure why my thinking was so far off base.

Diane: The greatest lesson for me was that I was still the teacher in this space, and I should have spent time preparing the audience to engage in discussion. This could have been done as Virginia suggested with reflective writing, or with dyads or other small group discussion techniques. I should have spent time engaging the participants before the film to get a better sense of who they were and why they had decided to attend this session. When I think back on it now, I wonder if our audience (all educators themselves) had expected us to prepare them for discussion, and if the fact that we did not contributed to the unexpectedly negative response. I still like to think they came willing to engage and open to be engaged in the topic.

Virginia: In the classroom I never begin a difficult dialogue without practicing some reflective writing and/or artistic response exercises first. Giving students a chance to respond before the discussion begins enhances both their thinking and the quality and depth of the discussion. If I could go back in time, I would ask the participants to form groups of three and write two-minute notes to each other. This strategy would allow each participant the opportunity to write and respond to two other group members before discussion. Perhaps grouping students with practicing educators would have resulted in a more personal sharing of written viewpoints and set the stage for a successful discussion.

I will never again assume that I know the audience and be unprepared for the unanticipated response. I will attempt to prepare for redirection and reframing after listening to the audience and acknowledging their responses. I did not acknowledge or honor the initial comments. Acknowledgement might have modeled the critical stance I hoped would characterize the session.

In the classroom I never begin a difficult dialogue without practicing some reflective writing and/or artistic response exercises first. Giving students a chance to respond before the discussion begins enhances both their thinking and the quality and depth of the discussion.

Classroom follow-up

Within a week of the public event, Virginia held a follow-up discussion with the APU graduate students who had attended the showing. In the safer, more comfortable environment of their shared classroom, these students were able to engage in the discussion both professors had been hoping for. They made thoughtful connections between education in Mexico and the U.S. without suggesting that U.S. teachers need to wage protest marches. Most of the discussion focused on the differences and similarities between the two educational systems and the potential of outside agencies like the World Bank and the World Trade Organization to impact public education.

One student reflected on the film in a final course assignment, a portfolio that illustrated her learning, experiences and reflections for the semester.

The value of engaging difficult dialogues in the classroom, however, was affirmed using techniques that foster trust, deep thinking, and discussion with peers after careful preparation. The written comments of students clearly exemplify the kind of reflective thinking needed to enhance civil discourse.

“This film visually illustrated the struggle of teachers in Mexico who advocate for adequate support of public education; pointing out the impact of our global economy and the influence of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (in this case, undermining the public education system in Mexico). The ideas of protesting and advocating for community control to let people shape their own destinies was thought provoking . . . our discussion on localizing to Alaska and issues around rural versus urban teaching; standardized testing; and the No Child Left Behind initiative seemed to draw parallels and left me pondering the question: What is most important to teachers?”

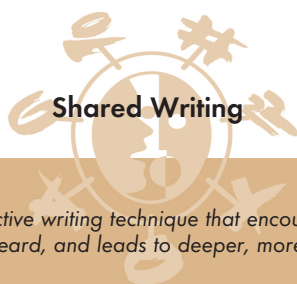
Curious about how other pre-service teachers would respond, Virginia also showed it to her junior-level undergraduate Literacy and Communication class. When the film ended, before discussion, she asked students to complete a quick writing exercise. This group of students had been exposed to *Difficult Dialogue* methods, including quick writes, for two semesters. They also practiced weekly reflective

writing in response to readings and classroom activities, usually as a prequel to discussion. Samples of student written responses to the film are below.

- *“My initial thought was that what I was seeing was not even comparable to the lack of funding that we often complain about in the United States. Then, it occurred to me that the struggle to fight for equal education ultimately lies within us, regardless if it’s fighting for money, materials, buildings, or opportunities. What is happening in Mexico is happening all over the world—even in rural areas or small areas in Eastern Kentucky or in New York. The similarities are overwhelming.*

- *“When we watch TV and see Ford, Coca Cola, and all of these other corps. building schools we think “Yes!” But now I realize this is just a way of privatizing schools. These things that happened in Mexico are happening here! They withhold our funding until we improve our scores so our people fit the mold they have set! When we allow this to happen we take the importance of wisdom away from education. We have to stop looking @ our world as a fractured surface with walls separating us and begin to see it as 1 world, 1 people who all have a right to a free and informed education. It’s not about \$ or politics. It’s about making the lives of every person better, safe, free, and worth living!”*
- *“The video validated how governmental and political influences affect people of all diversities socially, economically, spiritually, and environmentally. The struggle that the teachers faced is all too common to the oppressed and indignities of others before them. In teaching, there is and has been a struggle over issues involving the intents, interests, and decisions imposed onto the communities. Greed and domination play a big part in how the effectiveness of an institution burdened a people to achieve their agenda.”*

These students—undergraduates, novices—uncovered many of the issues that we had hoped to discuss in the public showing. They recognized that the film exemplifies issues and needs occurring in many countries (including their own), connected it with their evolving philosophies of education, and wondered whether they would be able to follow their own beliefs in the classroom. They recognized similar power struggles in the U.S. and discussed why the teachers in Mexico have been gathering to protest while teachers in the U.S. seem more accepting of these influences on their classrooms and teaching practices. They not only got it, but they were able to talk about it as well.



Shared Writing

A reflective writing technique that encourages personal reflection, provides opportunities for all voices to be heard, and leads to deeper, more thoughtful conversations.

Set it up.

- Divide the class into groups of three or four.
- Provide a prompting question, and ask students to write an initial response for two or three minutes.

Pass it around.

- Ask students to pass their paper to the next student in the group, read what the first student wrote, and write a response for two or three minutes on that same piece of paper.
- Repeat the procedure until each student has responded to all the others in the group.

Start talking.

- Return the papers to their originators, take a few minutes for everyone to read the written discussion they find there, and then open up the question for oral discussion.

This technique was adapted from Harvey Daniels.

Final Thoughts

The differences are striking: between public event and classroom discussion, between giving participants the time and space to respond on their own and just diving right in to the discussion, between shutting down a conversation and opening it up.

The public event was presented to a mixed group of students, professors, and community members who had never worked together before. Audience members did not know one another. We did not take the time at the beginning to set ground rules for civil discourse or otherwise prepare them for the film, so when some individuals had strong reactions the conversation became limited to those reactions. The first comment was aggressive, and we were not able to turn it to a more positive note and substantive discussion.

In contrast, the APU undergraduate students were a cohesive group characterized by trust, friendship, and a common mission of completing the education program and becoming teachers. They had been exposed to *Difficult Dialogues* methods, including quick writes and reflective responding, for two semesters. They were familiar with the techniques, vested in the process, and enjoyably engaged in both the writing and the discussions that followed.

Public events with disparate groups of participants are high-risk activities for entering into controversial discussion. There is no time to establish trust, no time for thoughtful reflection, and not many reasons to share your deepest thoughts with strangers. The value of engaging difficult dialogues in the classroom, however, was affirmed using techniques that foster trust, deep thinking, and discussion with peers after careful preparation. The written comments of students clearly exemplify the kind of reflective thinking needed to enhance civil discourse. We will continue to use these techniques in our classes to grow good thinkers, reflective writers, and socially conscious citizens and teachers while improving our ability to take on difficult topics in public forums.

Criminal justice issues are rarely, if ever, decided based on research and empirical evidence alone. Public opinion and public policy are also based on moral beliefs, values, and assumptions about human nature that may or may not correspond to the evidence. This essay discusses the need to acknowledge and confront underlying assumptions in the process of engaging controversies in criminal justice.

Controversies in Criminal Justice

Dr. Ronald S. Everett

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Dr. Sharon Chamard

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As a field of inquiry, criminal justice is replete with inherently controversial issues: the death penalty, gun control, marijuana legalization, prostitution decriminalization, and the balance between due process and crime control, to name just a few. Beyond these public policy debates are differences in explanations of why crime happens and why some people commit crime or become offenders. At the heart of these theoretical discussions are fundamental questions about human nature. Are we born with a propensity for evil that must be socialized out of us? Or are we born essentially good or as blank slates, as people who only do bad things because of bad environments and disparities in society?

In the field of criminal justice (like other social sciences), knowledge is derived from two sources: facts and evidence generated through the research process; and values and assumptions about human nature and how society should be organized. Controversies also arise from these sources. When a discipline has amassed enough empirical evidence about a particular question (assuming the evidence is fairly univocal), the issue is no longer controversial, at least to most professionals or experts. But students and large segments of the general public may lack the experience, knowledge, and skills to look at these issues in the same kind of depth; what is controversial to them (e.g., the death penalty) may be pretty much nondebateable for criminologists, whereas issues that are controversial to criminologists (such as criminal careers and crime specialization) may seem uninteresting to students.

It is the nature of social science research that there are competing claims and ambiguous findings. The layperson's or introductory-level student's inability to evaluate research on criteria such as sample, reliability, validity, appropriateness of statistical tests, and so on makes them vulnerable to persuasion from other sources. For example, mass media coverage of crimes committed by sex offenders, particularly those who victimize children, focuses on extremely rare incidents, such as the Polly Klaas and Megan Kanka cases. Both of these victims were sexually assaulted and killed by sex offenders who had been released from prison but were under correctional supervision in the community. The fact that the overwhelming majority of children who are sexually abused by adults are victimized by family members or friends is glossed over. Similarly, it is known by criminologists that

sex offenders have among the lowest rates of re-arrest, yet the average person on the street probably believes the opposite. If they think of the typical sex offender as a child molester who abducts young girls from their bedrooms at night or as a deviant with uncontrollable urges, it's not surprising that they might see mandatory sex offender registries as important mechanisms to increase community safety. Most research, however, has not supported the efficacy of these registries; they don't seem to reduce recidivism or increase public protection. Nevertheless, few public officials are willing to

speak against them because of their widespread emotional and public support.

What seems to happen in many classrooms is a clash between acknowledgment and respect for expert authority and the naïve assumption of the equality of ideas.

Ought professors to encourage discussion about criminal justice issues that have been resolved empirically? If there are no grounds for debate other than moral beliefs and ideology, is it even appropriate to address the matter in a social science classroom? We argue that it is especially important to focus on these issues because so much public opinion—and public policy—is shaped by moral beliefs, values, and assumptions about human nature. In many decisions about criminal justice policy, facts derived from rigorous research and policy analysis are trumped by unsupported beliefs about what causes crime and how it can be best prevented. How else to explain policies

such as Megan's Law (sex offenders' registries) and "Three Strikes and You're Out" mandatory sentencing? The former is based on faulty assumptions about sex offenders while the latter assumes harsher punishments to be a deterrent against serious and violent crimes. In both instances, shared public beliefs, amplified by the media, are used to justify policies that lack evidence-based support.

If students lack the skills to evaluate claims empirically, they also seem reluctant to take the word of those with some authority to advise them. The proliferation of blogging and social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube has made it possible for even the most ill-informed and asinine ramblings to be elevated to a footing nearly equal to that of the measured opinions of specialists and experts. We should not find it surprising, then, that students question assertions of their professors and texts. On the one hand, skepticism is something to be nurtured; a questioning citizenry is the foundation of a good democracy, after all. On the other hand, it is troubling if this skepticism is fueled not by a careful weighing of the evidence supporting a particular view, but by an assumption that all views are created equal and thus are equally likely to be valid.

This troubling assumption derives from the point of view that everyone is biased and everyone has an agenda, therefore any opinion is as good as any other, and we're each entitled to our own. While it is certainly the case that scientists and scholars are frequently not as objective as they purport to be, this is not an adequate reason for the discounting of authority and devaluing of expertise that seems increasingly prevalent among university students and the general public.

What seems to happen in many classrooms is a clash between acknowledgment and respect for expert authority and the naïve assumption of the equality of ideas. Professors may presume their statements and perspectives will be granted a more privileged position by virtue of their greater knowledge. They are likely to value the gradual accumulation of evidence, and the expertise and skill of those who conduct the research to produce this evidence. They are also likely to accept that some people know more than others, and that there are answers, even if not absolute.

Many contemporary students, on the other hand, seem not to value the slow, disciplined efforts necessary to understand complex or technical issues. Little in contemporary popular culture reinforces the importance of knowledge mastery. Many students seem actually to reject the value of knowledge, questioning whether it really matters much if you do not know. As one student stated, “I had to read this twice and I still don’t understand it all...I really think this is unnecessarily difficult.” Couple this resistance to studying complex academic material with a subtle anti-intellectualism and a declining attention span in the culture at large, and it becomes a challenge to orchestrate informed discussion of controversial issues. The acceptance of anti-rationalism in public discussions, such as the demand to include intelligent design in science courses, only strengthens the assumption that facts are superfluous and belief is all you need.

The view that everyone has an agenda and is biased to some large or small degree is arguable. But the naïve or cynical adoption of this view, to the exclusion of other perspectives, allows one to easily dismiss the messenger no matter how credible or above reproach. This perspective goes beyond the cynical interpretation of or skeptical reaction to news reports or research results; indeed, it alters students’ views of real-world problems and helps them avoid wrestling with controversial issues. A classroom incident illustrates this point. We showed our Justice Policy class the film *Dead Man Walking* (and the Frontline documentary about the book on which it is based) about Sister Helen Prejean’s work with death row inmates. Some students questioned her actions, claiming that she was doing what she was doing as a way to get attention, to receive rewards, and so on. We find it hypercritical and judgmental to believe that everyone, even a Catholic nun who opposes the death penalty and has taken vows of poverty and obedience, is working an angle, has an ulterior motive, and is acting always in his or her own self-interest.

Dismissing the messenger as a self-serving opportunist allows students to ignore the more distressing issues about the implementation of the death penalty presented in the film. Similarly, evidence that points to racial or ethnic bias in sentencing seems to generate little outrage and few calls for change. A cynical and skeptical filter of all information coupled with the ignorance or dismissal of evidence has a way of diffusing controversial issues of their substance. What used to have the power to shock and surprise is now perceived as normative and nothing to get excited about. These attitudes lead inevitably to apathy, i.e., “That’s how it is, how it always has been, and always will be.” With this world view, nothing is controversial. Certainly nothing is controversial to a degree that change or intervention may be required.

If you rely only on sweeping assumptions about human nature or the natural order of things, you will be unlikely to try to improve the situation. If you are cynical, you are never surprised, and if you are skeptical, you are always suspicious. If you respond with apathy when presented with an example of injustice, it is a small step to conclude that there is no reasonable solution. If there is no solution, there is nothing to worry about and no reason to interrupt the endless pursuit of our own pleasures and personal concerns.

A cynical and skeptical filter of all information coupled with the ignorance or dismissal of evidence has a way of diffusing controversial issues of their substance.

What is the solution to the subtle anti-intellectualism and cynicism we see all around us? We offer the following points for consideration.

- Focus on the assumptions embedded in the various positions surrounding a controversial issue, especially those students may unknowingly make as they express their own views on the same issues.
- Use structured discussions that explicitly identify the ground rules for engaging in civil discussion.
- Distinguish what is controversial: is the debate over the empirical findings of research or the values and ideologies of advocates?
- Consider using course readers that are specifically designed to present more than one side of a particular controversy. Remember that there are frequently more than two sides.
- Debate the issues, using the forms of structured in-class debates detailed in Chapter 2.
- Be willing to experiment. Consider bringing in first-person narratives, guest speakers, even a book by a compelling author. These strategies may seem unscientific to many professors; after all, the plural of anecdote is not data. Yet if our goal is to break through students' cocoons of indifference, perhaps we ought to put a human face to statistics and theory.



For more on staging classroom debates, see page 53. For a strategy based on the *Justice Talking* radio show format, see page 64.

As I read the preceding essay, I was reminded of what Paulo Freire called “critical consciousness” and what City University of New York Professor Ira Shor calls “critical pedagogy,” which he defines as “[h]abits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath the surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root cause, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse.” Students who achieve critical consciousness no longer say, “That’s how it is, how it always has been, and always will be” as they have done in the Criminal Justice courses described by Drs. Everett and Chamard. They believe that things can be changed—and that they can make a difference.

The Justice students may be experiencing what Shor calls forms of false consciousness: ways of thinking and being that predispose people to accept society as unproblematic and unchangeable. Shor identifies several categories of false consciousness, including:

- **Reification:** A belief in a fixed and unchangeable social and economic system and the inability to see systematic wholes. The pursuit of human solidarity would be considered a waste of time. Material acquisition provides fulfillment as opposed to doing things—particularly with others—to change the system.
- **Pre-scientific thinking:** A belief in a fixed human nature and an acceptance of unverifiable reasons to explain things that happen (e.g., the belief in luck or pure chance). If something is wrong or bad, well that’s just human nature. If someone has become famous or has achieved status and wealth, that person is considered lucky.
- **Acceleration:** The fast pace of everyday life allowed by machines and technology, some that help us go faster and some that entertain us. This results in sensory overload; critical reflection becomes less important than keeping the pace.
- **Mystification:** Responses or “truths” that obscure sources and solutions to problems. They include responses based on forms of bigotry (e.g., Single mothers on welfare are lazy and don’t want to work. That’s why they have their babies in the first place.)

To encourage critical consciousness, teachers may need to teach some basics about their discipline, including its assumptions about human nature and how knowledge is made. That would include what is researched, how it is researched, what counts as evidence, and how the evidence is used to make arguments. Social scientists might try modeling how they would evaluate a claim from a non-social sciences community. The point would not be that other claims are incorrect or far-fetched, but rather that they are incorrect or far-fetched according to the way a social scientist makes knowledge.

It isn’t easy to get students to think in a different way, but at the very least we can teach them that different communities make knowledge in different ways and so there are different ways to look at the world. I ask my students to see the world as I do for a semester: that is, to see themselves as constructed by language and constructing through language. I teach them what this means, and I show them how to make knowledge with that stance. They don’t always like the knowledge they make, for it makes them feel pushed around and controlled. But they can’t deny that the tools I provide them lead them to their conclusions. Finally, as they challenge me throughout the semester, I tell them that they don’t have to agree with me, but I do hope they perceive the world as a less simple place than they did before taking my class.

Patricia Jenkins
English

SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE

Throughout this handbook, several references have been made to individuals and organizations that claim to speak on behalf of academic freedom but are considered by the mainstream of university academic organizations to be instead violating its spirit. In the spirit of the Encircled Circle technique (see page 84), we invite you to consider these ideas and ask yourself what's at stake here.

The Academic Bill of Rights (ABOR)

The Academic Bill of Rights (ABOR) is a manifesto written by David Horowitz, president of the Center for the Study of Popular Culture and the author of *Left Illusions: An Intellectual Odyssey*. Horowitz believes that what he refers to as “academic and educational values” have been threatened by “the unwarranted intrusion of faculty members’ political views into the classroom.” According to Horowitz, the ABOR emphasizes intellectual diversity and “enumerate[s] the rights of students to not be indoctrinated or otherwise assaulted by political propagandists in the classroom or any educational setting.” Claiming that “you can’t get a good education if they’re only telling you half the story,” Horowitz proposed in 2002 that universities adopt an ABOR. His ABOR document became the foundational piece for a public advocacy group called Students for Academic Freedom (SAF), established in 2003.

The ABOR sounds well intentioned. Consider its opening paragraph on the mission of the university:

The central purposes of a University are the pursuit of truth, the discovery of new knowledge through scholarship and research, the study and reasoned criticism of intellectual and cultural traditions, the teaching and general development of students to help them become creative individuals and productive citizens of a pluralistic democracy, and the transmission of knowledge and learning to a society at large. Free inquiry and free speech within the academic community are indispensable to the achievement of these goals. The freedom to teach and to learn depend upon the creation of appropriate conditions and opportunities on the campus as a whole as well as in the classrooms and lecture halls. These purposes reflect the values—pluralism, diversity, opportunity, critical intelligence, openness and fairness—that are the cornerstones of American society.

However, a number of educational and public interest groups (including the American Federation of Teachers, American Association of University Professors, American Library Association, National Coalition Against Censorship, The National Association of Scholars, AFL-CIO, and Source Watch) have spoken out against the ABOR, charging that the bill is itself a threat to academic freedom. The opposition focuses on phrases such as the “appropriate conditions and opportunities” in the passage above as well as other passages suggesting that “appropriate educational policy” would include required readings on more than one side of a political controversy. The key word in both passages is “appropriate.” The implication is that the institution should decide what will be taught, not the professor.

The ABOR also presumes that student rights are the primary academic freedom issues, and that a way of teaching can be innocent and free of ideology. These presumptions are at least uninformed (see also pages 3-11 and pages 188-193), and many critics suggest that they are unethical as well: that, in fact, David Horowitz and the Students for Academic Freedom are true enemies of free thought and free speech, that feeling victimized by academic freedom, they have fought back with a somewhat disguised agenda.

However, as several writers in this collection have noted, no one is victimized by academic freedom. They may be offended perhaps, but they are not victimized.

Students for Academic Freedom (SAF)

Students for Academic Freedom is a public advocacy group established by David Horowitz in 2003 with the stated intent of protecting students from attempts at political indoctrination by some professors. It considers itself as a national coalition of independent campus groups as well as a movement. According to its website, its mission is to “restore academic freedom and educational values to America’s institutions of higher learning.” Through the adoption of the Academic Bill of Rights by university chapters, it seeks to regulate faculty behavior and to prescribe course content, claiming that professors violate their professional obligation if they endorse a particular political viewpoint. It construes academic freedom as student access to a diversity of viewpoints, and it considers the pursuit of knowledge as necessarily disinterested.

American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA)

Founded in 1995 by Lynne V. Cheney, former Governor Richard D. Lamm of Colorado, Senator Joseph I. Lieberman of Connecticut, social scientist David Riesman, writer Saul Bellow, and others, ACTA describes itself as the only national organization to “support liberal arts education, uphold high academic standards, safeguard the free exchange of ideas on campus, and ensure that the next generation receives a philosophically-balanced, open-minded, high-quality education at an affordable price.” To achieve these ends, ACTA endorses a back-to-basics view of education and calls for a national core curriculum for higher education. Reacting to a perception of politicization of the classroom, it redefines diversity in terms of politics instead of race, class, or culture and argues for what it refers to as “intellectual diversity” in the higher education curriculum. The organization provides reports, speeches, testimonies, and a newsletter to advise alumni and donors, trustees, and state leaders about its views on academic excellence, academic freedom, and accountability. It also offers services for these groups so that they can effect change at their institutions.

DIFFICULT DIALOGUE LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

As some of us learned to our chagrin, planning only takes you so far. Once you put your plans into practice, it's a whole new ball game. Anything can happen, and usually does.

In designing and presenting our faculty intensives, we learned a lot from experience. The first one we held was especially rocky; this group was the test case for much of what we would later refine. Admittedly, too many of the presentations were static rather than interactive; the language referred too heavily to one university over the other; and our own expectations for engaging in difficult dialogues within the group were not fully met. Nevertheless, we didn't expect as much kick-back as we got. The first group challenged almost all of our choices, from the textbook to the agenda to the presentation styles of the guest speakers.

This surprised us. We had worked very hard to design and present the week's activities, and we expected our learners to understand and appreciate our efforts. We thought they would work with us a little more, forgive us a few little lapses in presentation, and empathize with the fact that their colleagues were test-driving a newly created curriculum. What happened instead was that they acted a lot like students, expecting us to have our act completely together all the time, to honor the multiple and often conflicting learning styles and concerns of all of them, and to give them what they had signed up for, which in this case was a safe place to explore with their colleagues on equal footing the great issues of our time.

We learned from that experience. The second time the presentations were much tighter, the exercises more interactive, and the facilitator more keenly aware of the hidden power dynamics in the room. And, as so often happens in the classroom, the overall personality of the group was completely different; where there had been firestorms in the first intensive, there were relaxed, languid discussions in the second.

The third time was even better. We actively recruited more people of color and intentionally nurtured minority points of view all throughout the week. We introduced new strategies to surface critiques of our own methods and intentions. We also spent time planning for and engaging in our own difficult dialogue within the group. The group itself selected the topic, one that arose organically from other conversations during the week: should we require our faculties somehow to be trained in Alaska Native ways of knowing? We were surprised—and pleased—that the third group chose to take on this topic, and we attribute it to the level of trust they achieved and the willingness of the majority to entertain and be deeply affected by a different perception of reality.

With these experiences we relearned a seemingly obvious truth: controversy is everywhere. It's in science and religion and culture and class and identity and power and politics and language. It's also in our communities, our departments, our classrooms, our families. We learned to expect it everywhere. And we learned to be ready.

START TALKING

Questions for Discussion:

How can you prepare a public audience for productive discussion?

When, if ever, is it appropriate to reveal your political positions to your students? How can this information lead to a learning outcome?

How should you respond if you realize that students are giving you what you want in the interests of getting a good grade?

How much should academic freedom concern itself with students' rights of free expression versus faculty members' freedom of speech?

What are appropriate responses to charges of political bias or discrimination in the classroom?

How can you create a balanced discussion of a film, book, or performance with an explicit political position or purpose?

How do you bring current events into your classrooms? Intentionally, with a particular teaching purpose in mind? Or spontaneously, as they arise?

Outcomes

Our overall goal is to improve the learning climate on our campuses, making them more inclusive of minority voices and ways of knowing and safer places for learning and the free exchange of ideas.

UAA/APU Encountering Controversy Project

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FACULTY INTENSIVE

Outcomes

All in all, we moved things forward in a steady, relatively undramatic way. Very little blew up in our faces, and, with a few exceptions, very little rocked us to the core.

Grade us for effort and you'd find a normal bell curve. Some of us were achievers and stayed deeply engaged all year: redesigning old courses, holding risky community events, collaborating with new colleagues and friends. Most of us at least tried some new things: Codes of Conduct, Books of the Semester, Circle of Objects, Critical Incident Questionnaire. One dropped out altogether due to illness, and a few others did only the bare minimum. Of the original thirty participants, twenty-five were still seriously engaged at the end of the year.

Grade us for performance, and you'd get a different curve. Some events were so successful that people didn't want to leave. Others celebrated diversity, fostered community, and opened learners to new ideas. A few crashed and burned. But even these offered learning opportunities for those willing to take them. Just as you don't have to agree with someone to learn, so too are there lessons to be learned when things go wrong. As several people said, the important thing was that we actually initiated these dialogues. They were icebreakers to deeper conversations we need to have in the future.

We didn't solve the big questions of race, religion, global warming, or war. Nor did we kid ourselves that we could. Grade us for improvement, though, and you'd find it. This was what we were after, and this is what we achieved. We grew more comfortable with our abilities—as individuals and as a group—to engage in and strengthen civil discourse in our classrooms and communities. We are more likely to initiate important difficult dialogues and better able to field them when they crop up on their own. We're more thoughtful. We're better prepared. We're more of a team.

It is, as they say, a good start.

The Score

Working for us

- Effective faculty development model
- Greater awareness
- Increased strategies and skills
- More confidence
- More people to turn to for advice and support

Working against us

- Workloads still intense
- Teaching still challenging
- Time, energy, resources still limited
- Controversies won't go away
- World still needs changing

THE FACULTY INTENSIVE MODEL

Assessment results suggest that the faculty intensive model described in this handbook has measurable and sustained effects on participants. Among the statistically significant findings, our faculty participants reported themselves to be more comfortable about their abilities to create inclusive classrooms, more aware of how their own biases and political beliefs can get in the way of their teaching, and better prepared to handle disruptive or hostile students. They were also more knowledgeable, prepared, and confident about facilitating discussions on difficult or controversial subjects and less likely to avoid those topics in the future.

Primary Objective: Faculty Development

Dr. Claudia Lampman

Professor of Psychology

University of Alaska Anchorage

The primary objective of the UAA/APU *Encountering Controversy* project was to prepare faculty members to facilitate difficult dialogues in and outside the classroom. In May 2006, thirty faculty fellows (in two cohorts of fifteen each) participated in an intensive weeklong seminar designed to teach them about strategies for initiating and managing student discussions on potentially controversial or politically charged subjects. The faculty fellows were challenged to:

- consider their rights and responsibilities with regard to academic freedom;
- prepare themselves to handle students who were disruptive, hostile, or threatening;
- examine their own and societal-level biases that affect the learning environment; and
- incorporate strategies to create inclusive and safe classrooms and campus climates.

The goal of the intensive was to arm faculty with knowledge, skills, and strategies that would increase how comfortable and empowered they feel about handling controversial issues or difficult students. As a condition of participation, faculty fellows committed to implementing new strategies in some of their courses and other on-campus events during the following year.

Methods

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the intensive, faculty fellows completed a self-administered survey at three points in time: before the intensive (pre-test), at the end of the weeklong intensive (post-test), and one year later (end-test). The questionnaire was developed by the project's Assessment and Evaluation Coordinator in conjunction with the intensive's instructors and facilitators.

The survey contained 43 items in three sections:

1. Comfort and skills handling controversial issues or difficult students;
2. The learning environment; and
3. Academic freedom, rights, and policies.

All items were worded in the form of statements (e.g., *I am confident about my ability to lead classroom discussions on controversial subjects*). Participants indicated to what extent they agreed or disagreed with each statement on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Charts 1-3 display the mean response for each survey item at all three points in time, along with an indication of whether there were statistically significant differences in mean response between the pre- and post-test, pre- and end-test, and post- and end-test. Repeated analyses of variance were used to test for significant gains; statistical significance is reported at both the .05 and .01 levels.

Comfort and Skills Handling Controversial Issues or Difficult Students

Chart 1 summarizes the statistical results for this section. Faculty fellows reported feeling significantly more knowledgeable, well prepared, and confident about facilitating discussions on difficult or controversial subjects both right after the intensive and at the end of the year (items 2, 7, 12). They also reported feeling significantly more knowledgeable at the post- and end-tests about how to handle students who are disruptive, hostile, or threatening (items 5, 8, 9). Right after the intensive, they actually reported feeling slightly more fearful of losing control of their classrooms, but by the end of the year they were significantly more confident that this would not occur (item 3). Items 1 and 6 also show significant improvement following the intensive and at the end of the year concerning faculty members' likelihood to avoid teaching controversial issues.

The Learning Environment

Five items in this section showed positive and statistically significant gains from the pre-test to the end of the year (see Chart 2). Faculty participants became more confident in their ability to create inclusive classrooms (item 1) where Alaska Native students will feel comfortable (item 5), where students will feel comfortable expressing opinions that may be unpopular (item 10) or on sensitive/controversial issues (item 2), and where students trust that they will be fairly graded regardless of the opinions they express (item 8).

Although other gains were not statistically significant, two items showed that faculty were less likely to agree that minority students would feel silenced in their classroom (item 7) and more likely to agree that their students would perceive their classrooms to be safe (item 4) both after the intensive and at the end of the year.

Faculty fellows were also asked several questions about how their own biases and political beliefs might affect their teaching. They were significantly more likely to agree that their own politics or biases can get in the way of effective teaching both at the post- and end-test (item 6). Although the gains were not significant, faculty indicated they were more comfortable examining their own biases regarding race, religion, sexual orientation, or politics following the intensive (item 3), and were less likely to agree that their own views on religion would affect their teaching in the future (item 13). Faculty fellows were also significantly less likely to agree that they needed to learn strategies for creating an open classroom environment at the post- and end-tests (item 9).

Academic Freedom, Rights, and Responsibilities

The last section of the questionnaire assessed gains in faculty knowledge about their rights and responsibilities when dealing with difficult students and controversial issues in the classroom (see Chart 3). Our faculty participants reported significantly greater understanding after the intensive and at the end of the year about university policies regarding student conduct in the classroom (item 7); whom to contact when faced with a disruptive or hostile student (item 2); the role of the Dean of Students in dealing with problem students (items 3 and 6); and instructors' rights if a student becomes threatening (item 5).

Similarly, after the intensive and at the end of the year, faculty said they were much less likely to hesitate to report a problem student out of fear that it reflected poorly on them (item 9), and more likely to report disruptive students in general (item 4). Small but nonsignificant positive gains were also seen on the two items assessing faculty understanding of academic freedom (items 1 and 8). Finally, faculty reported being significantly more comfortable speaking freely (item 10) or expressing their own viewpoints (item 11) on controversial subjects in the classroom after the intensive and at the end of the year.

Summary

In sum, the data collected from faculty fellows before and after the intensive and one year later show that faculty felt considerably more comfortable and better-equipped to facilitate and manage difficult dialogues in their classrooms. The fact that most of the measures stayed the same or increased over the academic year suggests that this type of faculty development has measurable and sustainable benefits for faculty.

More detailed results of statistical analyses can be obtained by contacting Dr. Claudia Lampman (afcb1@uaa.alaska.edu)

Chart 1 Comfort and Skills Handling Controversial Issues or Difficult Students

(Response Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree)

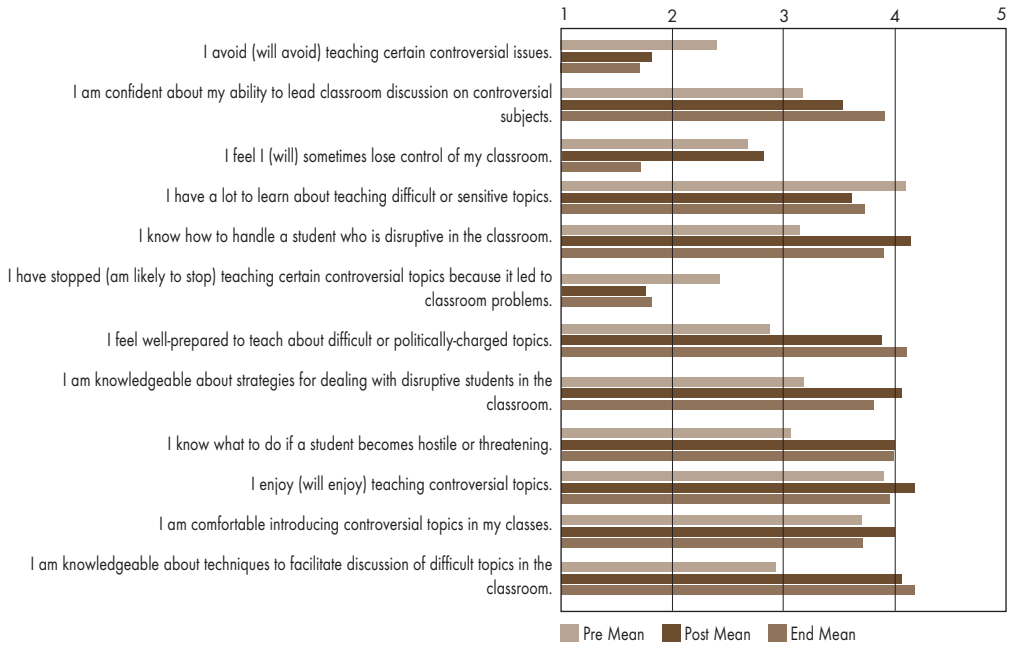


Chart 2 The Learning Environment

(Response Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree)

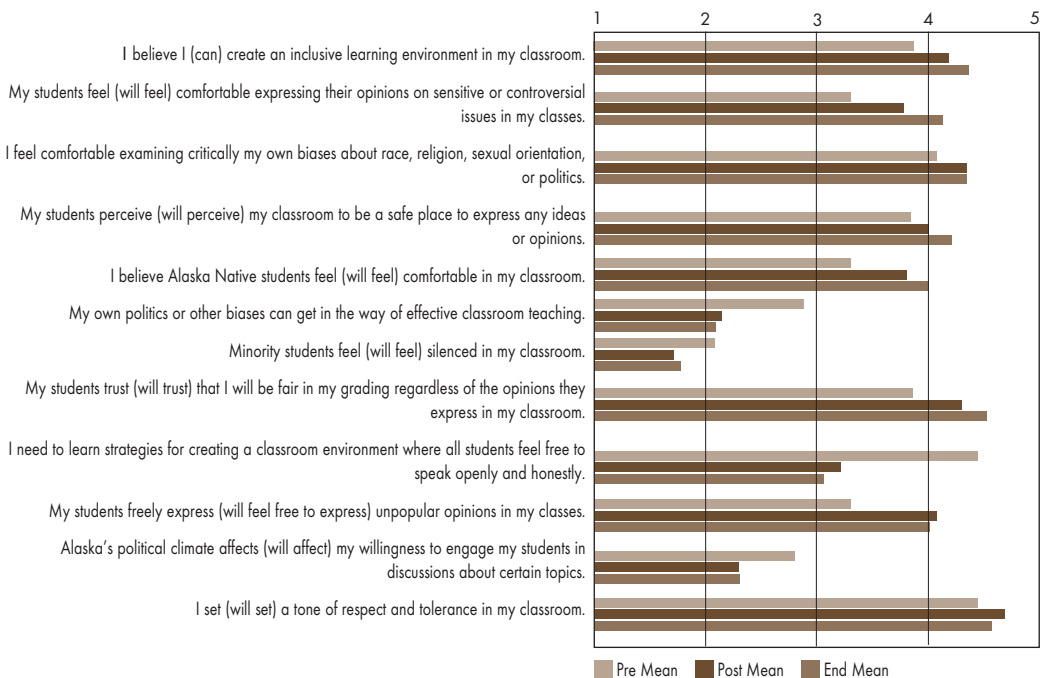


Chart 2 continued The Learning Environment

(Response Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree)

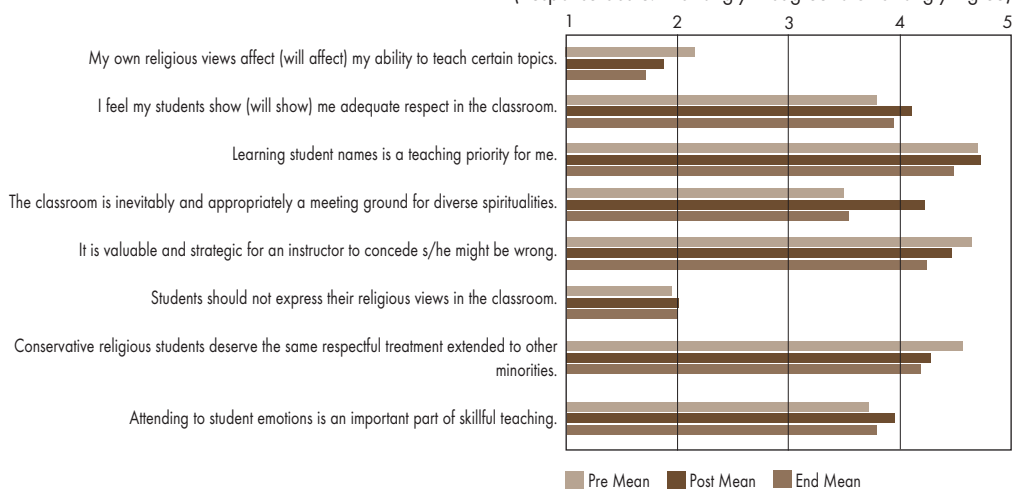


Chart 3 Academic Freedom, Rights, and Responsibilities

(Response Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree)



CHANGING THE WAY WE TEACH

In May 2007, our original two cohorts convened for a three-day retreat to share our experiences and reflect on what we'd learned. Although each of us had a unique story to tell, several themes seemed to be shared by many. Our year-long fellowship had strengthened our relationships, given us the courage to try new things, and changed, at least a little, the way we teach.

At UAA, these results were mostly personal and individual. At APU, they extended outward to the whole campus.

My participation in the *Difficult Dialogues* initiative brought home several important lessons that have helped to shape my pedagogy.

First, it is my responsibility to meet students where they are, to show them how to think about my subject and how to interrogate their own presuppositions, and to point out other ideas for them to pursue. It is not my job to show them that they are wrong or to change their minds, belief systems, or worldviews. It is up to them to decide whether or not to change.

Second, I must be open to the possibility that a student might learn something other than what I intend. Of course, they need to meet the educational objectives that I set, but they may also end up someplace I hadn't anticipated. In fact, I love that!

Third, my class is simply one of many that a student will take in college, and I am but one part of a process that may not bear fruit until many years later. I think we've all had that experience of suddenly understanding many years later what a certain teacher or professor was trying to say to us, and I know I treasure the notes and e-mails that I sometimes get from students years after they've taken my class.

Finally, as I tell students, I always reserve the right to contradict myself in class and say stupid things, because it's how I learn. If I can take the chance to learn something new by doing something risky and even potentially stupid, maybe students will too.

Dan Kline
English

The five Alaska Pacific University (APU) faculty members had the opportunity to work together differently, more consistently, and thus perhaps more effectively than any other group, leveraging their project participation into a catalyst for personal growth, professional transformation, and institutional change. Meeting regularly for coffee and conversation, weaving *Difficult Dialogues* strategies and techniques into classes and faculty retreats, opening dialogues on issues everyone was aware of but no one wanted to raise, these five colleagues started talking and kept it up all year long. This essay follows along on a few of their conversations.

APU's Fab Five: Collaboration, Community, Change

Dr. Tracy Stewart

Associate Professor of Leadership and Strategy
Alaska Pacific University

Dr. Maureen E. Austin

Associate Professor of Environmental Science and Outdoor Studies
Alaska Pacific University

APU's Fab Five

Dr. Leslie Cornick

Associate Professor of Marine Biology
and Statistics

Dr. Maureen E. Austin

Associate Professor of Environmental
Science and Outdoor Studies

Dr. Mei Mei Evans

Associate Professor of English

Dr. Tracy Stewart

Associate Professor of Leadership
and Strategy

Dr. Virginia Juettner

Associate Professor of Education

At the end of the year, when the project participants came back together to share their experiences and lessons learned with the group, the five of us from APU decided to make our presentation as a group. This says it all. As clichéd as it may sound, we had learned that the whole was greater than the sum of the parts. The synergies we experienced—as a group of five colleagues, as a university, and as part of the national *Difficult Dialogues* initiative—were more fulfilling than any of us initially imagined.

We used the metaphor of a banyan tree as a unifying framework for our presentation. The soil was seeded by the Ford Foundation and enriched by our two universities: APU and UAA. The main trunk represented collegiality, the five of us intertwined, individuals but working together. The branches were our classrooms, our campus, and the collaboration between the two universities. The leaves were our individual outcomes (more on this later) and the new trunks shooting down were representative of future outcomes, such as student changes, campus cultural changes, and the new group of faculty participants who would be starting on a journey of their own the following week.

We applied for the fellowship as individuals with a variety of individual reasons, but we left as colleagues, with stronger relationships between us, and more confidence in our teaching and our ability to affect institutional change. It was not until we neared the end of the year that we started to appreciate the full impact of what we'd experienced and accomplished.

Why We Applied

Leslie: I wanted some new skills and tools to help me deal with questions on science and religion—both in impromptu situations and in planned discussions. I also wanted to have more effective discussions in the classroom across the board, in all of my classes, especially my freshman class on Science as a Way of Knowing. I also hoped for increased contact with my colleagues at both APU and UAA.

Maureen: I was intrigued by the purpose of the grant and felt that by participating in the project I could learn ways to better engage my students in the classroom. I wanted to have a few additional teaching techniques to add to my toolbox. I have several friends who are part of the UAA faculty, so the opportunity to work with them and others from UAA was of interest to me as well.

Virginia: Fostering deep thinking in class discussion has always been a challenge. I wanted to learn new strategies for developing deep thinkers, enhance critical literacy lessons, and improve the quality of class participation and discussion, particularly in my undergraduate education classes.

Tracy: In hindsight, I realize that constructive use of dialogue has always been a key professional and personal tool. I applied because I hoped to find more structured or scientific ways to use discussion and interpersonal interaction as tools for learning. I was also intrigued by the opportunity to participate with UAA. The idea of collaboration, not competition, really appealed to me.

What We Expected

Leslie: I honestly tried not to have any expectations other than being excited to try new things. I suppose I expected that the techniques would help me facilitate discussion, but I really wasn't sure how or whether it would work, especially given the limited success I'd had before in getting students to really engage in my class discussions.

Maureen: I left the workshop very excited about the upcoming school year, full of ideas and insights into how to approach my class prep. I expected that teaching would feel different to me, but wasn't sure how that difference would manifest itself. I also expected that my workload would be more intense, given the various requirements that came with being part of the grant project.

Virginia: I was positive the workshop was going to be about critical literacy and rich discussions, so I was shocked that we spent the entire first day talking about disruptive students and safety in the classroom.

Tracy: I expected to learn some new and better ways of using discussion in my classes. I also expected to be able to learn from people with more years of academic experience. I was seeking wisdom.

Our Experience of the Intensives

During the May '06 training, we were divided into two groups: Maureen and Mei Mei attended the first week; Virginia, Tracy, and Leslie the second. We were all struck by a couple of repeated themes: limited or no time to engage in dialogue of our own, an emphasis on reacting to problems rather than stimulating discussion, and the assumption of a single group norm.

In fairness, there was an immense amount of material to be covered. Unfortunately, in the midst of so much information, we did not get to really engage in dialogues of our own. Practicing techniques, while helpful, was not the same as truly engaging. The early emphasis on reacting to difficult students and preventing classroom violence took us even further away from real dialogue. While important, and clearly a bigger issue on UAA's much larger campus, it seemed to be more

about shutting down difficult dialogues than encouraging them.

The presenters didn't seem to notice that APU brought anything qualitatively different to the table. They seemed to think the challenges were the same at both universities, and that UAA represented the norm.

These became greater issues because so much of the training seemed to be UAA-centric. Materials tended to be prefaced with the phrase "at UAA..." When we pointed this out, the presenters made an effort to at least acknowledge our geographical differences ("at APU this is whom you would contact") but didn't seem to notice that APU brought anything qualitatively different to the table. There seemed to be a perception that challenges at APU were the same as at UAA, and that UAA represented the norm. We found this one-sidedness quite frustrating.

These three themes shaped the way we moved forward at APU. We wanted to promote controversy, find ways to engage, and avoid a campus-centric bias. APU's philosophy of active learning and the related notion of student-centered applied learning worked exceptionally well with the tenets of difficult dialogues. Discussion, student interaction, and hands-on approaches have long been a part of how we teach at APU. Our smaller size and emphasis on teaching give us extra flexibility to implement innovative approaches. The five of us started out with a sense that we wanted to "engage" not "encounter" controversy. We wanted to honor it proactively as part of our teaching.

The Academic Year

We began the year focusing on how we would meet our obligation to share the techniques with our colleagues. Jokingly calling ourselves the "Fabulous Five", we started meeting regularly for coffee, using the meetings to exchange ideas, lend moral support, solicit feedback, and plan and implement campus-wide activities. In keeping with our active learning mission, we wanted to teach the concepts dynamically, introducing techniques by fostering the very discussion we wanted to promote in the classroom. We quickly came to realize that there were parallel conversations occurring: the overt, stated conversation was about the techniques, and the tacit, unstated conversation was about having the conversation itself.

There was no turning back. We embraced this meta-learning. We were determined to address difficult, controversial conversations on our campus each time we shared techniques with our colleagues. Our willingness to model, to engage, made it easier. Courage to speak the “unspeakable” made it less dangerous, less risky.

In any organization there are unstated concerns—core controversies—that everyone is aware of but no one raises. Furthermore, there are gatekeepers: policies and procedures that impact what gets addressed and when it gets addressed. These may not be nefarious attempts to prevent action; it’s just that there is so much to do every day that organizations (and individuals within them) get stuck in patterns, habits, and ways of doing things until it becomes nearly impossible to see alternatives or to change things. Keeping these issues submerged only encourages them to fester, but broaching them the wrong way can be even worse, increasing toxicity in the organization as anger drives the discussion, and rage and pain make solutions nearly impossible. Hopelessness and helplessness become the way the system operates.

The mission to engage controversy made us determined to shake things up a little, promote new ways of doing things, address the previously side-lined or buried difficult dialogues, and—hopefully—positively impact teaching across the campus.

We started with the fall retreat, modeling a number of techniques (including Quick Writes, small group discussions, and a variation of the Encircled Circle technique that we called the Fish Bowl) to lead our colleagues in a discussion on a chapter from *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, our fall Book of the Semester. We also organized a fall colloquium to encourage others to consider the questions raised by the initiative. We used a version of the Shared Writing technique (see p. 199), asking each faculty member to write down what makes it hard for them to bring up difficult dialogues in the classroom. Breaking the group into triads, we passed our papers around and responded to two others before returning each paper to the original writer. We followed this exercise with a group discussion about what makes dialogue difficult in different disciplines. We also had people write about things they valued and did not value about working at APU. These responses were then read aloud, anonymously, by one of us. We ended the day with another open group discussion about the exercises themselves and the honest and meaningful ideas they had generated.

At the spring retreat we broached two of those unstated concerns that our campus seemed to be addressing only peripherally: assessment and sustainability. The first topic was raised as a departmental task with a structured constructive focus. The second was approached with a focus on sustainable organizational systems. We began by having people brainstorm definitions which were recorded without discussion. People were then asked to write about their thoughts/reactions to the notion of organizational sustainability and then to share their ideas with two other people they did not know

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well. We read the small group reflections to the larger group. People were asked to complete an exit sheet with their thoughts, feelings, questions and commitments (and their hopes about the institutional commitments too). Our intention was to turn these exit sheets over to next year's Fellows with the hope that they would continue the discussion in the fall.

Outcomes

Collegiality. Part of the process and a clear outcome was the sheer collegiality of it all. We developed a common language and purpose that merged well with the existing university mission.

It was not lost on us that we came from different disciplines, and indeed this fact helped to broaden the approaches we took. The fact that we came from different departments lent a perspective to our individual and collective work that we all found invaluable...Our selection bolstered our confidence, the training and networking provided the tools, but this was also clearly one of those felicitous occasions where personalities meshed and enabled a synchronous collegiality that benefited each of us enormously. We hope it will continue to benefit others at our university with whom we work.

Mei Mei Evans
English

The phrase "difficult dialogues" became shorthand for any topic that generated controversy. The camaraderie we experienced was not unlike a lifeboat in a sea of complexity and challenge. In survival training you are taught to link together for warmth, support, and safety. Our monthly meetings had the same effect on us. We were able to stretch in the classroom and on the campus because we were not alone.

Interdisciplinary Collaboration. Our informal gatherings also allowed us to learn more about our respective departments and made it easier to work together across campus. Together, we represented five of the six departments at APU. The very differences in our departmental perspectives forced us to listen better and learn more. Our collective experiences gave us more voice in campus-wide events because we could speak the different departmental languages.

Collaboration with UAA. Opportunities to work with colleagues from another university expanded the experience of interdisciplinary collegiality. Maureen joined her APU colleagues Regina Boisclair and Mike Loso and UAA's Steve Colt and Libby Roderick as discussion facilitators following several showings of *An Inconvenient Truth*. Tracy worked with UAA's Bogdan Hoanca to present an inter-campus showing of *The Corporation* (detailed in Chapter 5, pages 162-166). Virginia collaborated with UAA's Diane Erickson to show the movie *A Grain of Sand* (also detailed in Chapter 5, pages 194-200). Leslie participated in a lively panel discussion on science and religion with UAA's Travis Rector and Dan Kline (detailed in Chapter 4, pages 140-158).

Changing the Way We Teach

Our involvement in the *Difficult Dialogues* initiative gave us confidence to take chances in our classrooms, changing the way we teach.

Leslie: I'm much braver in the classroom. I'm not afraid to use discussion frequently now, and when it doesn't go well I'm not afraid to stop the class and ask why. Nor am I afraid to just let them sit with their silence. I'm much less caught off guard by random questions or comments that are controversial. I feel much better able to manage the classroom in terms of reining in unruly behavior and bringing things back to topic when a discussion gets off on a tangent. I'm also much less worried about how my classroom management will affect my teaching evaluations.

Maureen: This experience has broadened my approach to teaching. I used to channel my enthusiasm for learning into carefully designed exercises that were meant to teach students the content while inspiring their own desire to learn. This year I approached teaching with a more questioning and open mind, to the point that sometimes I went into the classroom not knowing how I would present that day's material or what might transpire. I was initially very nervous about this, but then I saw that the learning process can be enhanced for students when their instructor is learning along with them. This realization further energized and engaged me as an instructor. While I still came to class prepared and with an agenda to cover, I also allowed some time and created opportunities for my students to share their struggles and help each other better grasp the material. And I was much more willing to stop in the middle of class and call students out who weren't acting particularly engaged, ask them why and what we might do to help them feel more engaged.

Mei Mei: In the spring, when I discovered that the majority of my writing students were Marine Biology majors, I shifted an assignment to include a focus on the issue of *over-fishing*. Without my involvement in the *Difficult Dialogues* initiative, it is unlikely that I would have taken on a topic that is so unfamiliar to me. But I felt emboldened by my involvement to seek greater relevancy in my composition instruction: to explicitly use my teaching to address real issues that affect us all and to invite my students to engage and respond to that conversation as well. I think it was instructive for them to see their English teacher willing to risk her own ignorance in an effort to become better educated. I also think they enjoyed teaching me something about their field.

Tracy: There is a sense of seamless timelessness when things are going well in the classroom that seems to happen more often for me now. In those moments, there is true power in learning. I love being in that space. You can almost see the wheels spinning in the minds of the students. I have found better ways to use discussion to facilitate learning. While more adept at planning to introduce controversial topics, I also find I react more fluidly to the unplanned ones as well. My comfort as a teacher has improved.

I'm much braver in the classroom. I'm not afraid to use discussion frequently now, and when it doesn't go well I'm not afraid to stop the class and ask why.

Virginia: I completely enjoyed our textbook and tried out many of the strategies and techniques, combining them with children’s literature on social justice themes for use in K-8 classrooms. My syllabi changed to include a detailed description of the importance of classroom discussion, and I began every class with guidelines for quality conversations developed by the students. I had the opportunity to present some of my students’ work at the *Difficult Dialogues* regional meeting in January 2007, and I brought back ideas from other universities (such as the Illumination Project’s Theatre of the Oppressed technique) to try out in my classrooms. I conducted two conference presentations to model *Difficult Dialogues* techniques to middle, high school, and post-secondary teachers, and I developed a summative evaluation of student learning using scrapbook techniques to synthesize *Difficult Dialogues* activities, readings, and reflections. I do not think I would have done so much or changed my courses so significantly if not for the *Difficult Dialogues* experiences. These opportunities enhanced my growing interest in engagement and the process of developing meaning through personal response using discussion, writing, performance, and art. I believe I am a better teacher and my students are more engaged and thoughtful about their assignments.

Campus-wide Changes

The techniques we modeled for our colleagues have reportedly been used by some of them in their own classrooms. We have also gotten feedback from people who want to use the concepts, to increase conversation in their classes, to explore the application in science/math etc., or who voiced a desire to participate in the next group of Fellows.

We started talking about a few things that had previously been buried, and we did so civilly. Using the fellowship, the training, and Tracy’s position as faculty chair, we leveraged the very core of our university mission, active learning, to bring in topics that might have otherwise seemed contrived or false.

We started talking about a few things that had previously been buried, and we did so civilly. Using the fellowship, the training, and Tracy’s position as faculty chair, we leveraged the very core of our university mission, active learning, to bring in topics that might have otherwise seemed contrived or false. We started small, giving successes and examples of civil discourse on topics not directly impacting the university and then built on this. The participation of the academic dean and the president’s wife on the project’s steering committee helped to legitimize the openness of the topics. We are particularly grateful to Dean Marilyn Barry for setting the tone of listening to, not shutting down, difficult topics, and to Tracy Stewart for using her role as faculty chair to weave the use of techniques and intentional topics throughout the agenda of our year-end

faculty retreat. Many of our colleagues feel it was the most useful retreat they had ever attended and thanked us for finally creating the space to discuss topics that were ripe for dialogue. Some of the acrimony that often arises with these topics was not evident. Furthermore, people were able to voice some unpopular views/suggestions and were heard, not shut down or drowned out.

Individual outcomes

Individually we have all been changed. There were transformations, large and small. Most of us found it expanded our boundaries, academically and personally. At the same time it was grounding, allowing us to reconnect with core, primal qualities.

Leslie: I definitely feel more empowered to tackle difficult conversations with my colleagues and administrators, and have the courage to state my opinions, even if they are counter to others'. It's probably what gave me the gumption to go up for promotion, and definitely gave me the courage to ask for other improvements in compensation for my program. I think that being able to express myself with more confidence in these situations makes them more likely to come out in my favor because it allows me to come across as deserving and worthy. That's something I've really struggled with in my academic career.

Maureen: This experience has filtered into other aspects of my life. I found myself more willing to stop and engage in discussions with family members that previously I might have avoided or simply let slide. When a family member commented on the war in Iraq, saying he doesn't understand the way "those people" think, I pressed him further, asking who exactly he meant by "those people." What transpired was an enlightening discussion, not only about the war, but about how generalizations can limit rather than encourage dialogue. To me that's a powerful example of how all my discussions, inside and outside the classroom, have become more rewarding. This training and experience has made me more willing to "go there."

Mei Mei: This fellowship has had the effect of encouraging me to devote significant amounts of time and energy to envisioning and constructing alternative models in my classroom and in my personal and professional life. It's not that I think there are any fewer conflagrations or that the work of stemming their proliferation is beneath my dignity; it's that I think we ignore the work of building what I'll call possible futures at our peril.

Parting thoughts

This story is a beginning, not a conclusion. Although our year in the hot seat is over, a new group of Fellows has been proceeding on their own terms. The five of us will continue to grow in our classrooms. None of us is likely to stop now. We all want to be a positive part of civil discourse on campus in the service of improving our university—for ourselves, for our students, for the community, and hopefully, in some small way, for the world.

We developed a common language and purpose that merged well with the existing university mission. The phrase "difficult dialogues" became shorthand for any topic that generated controversy.

Most of us gained confidence in our ability to manage difficult dialogues and expressed a new willingness to engage in them. But confidence is one thing. Actually engaging is something else. This essay follows one faculty member as she takes a chance on having a new kind of conversation in her class.

The Confidence to Have Difficult Dialogues

Dr. Nelta Edwards

*Assistant Professor of Sociology
University of Alaska Anchorage*

The faculty intensive introduced me to a variety of techniques that I experimented with over the course of the next year. But the most important benefit came unexpectedly toward the end of the spring semester, when thirty-two students and faculty members were killed by a lone gunman (who then killed himself) at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech).

The shooting occurred on a Monday. The next day, as my Introduction to Sociology class was ending, I asked students if they would like to take some time to talk about what happened. We might be able to look at it sociologically, I told them. They seemed interested, so I postponed the chapter that was assigned for Thursday, asked them to read as much as they could about the shooting, and told them we'd talk about it in class.

There were about 30 students in class on Thursday. We arranged the desks in a large circle. I started to my left and went around the circle, asking students to tell us what they knew about the incident. They had obviously been reading and watching the news and had picked up on a lot of different details. One student had gone to an anti-gun Web site and gotten some statistics on the amount of gun violence in the U.S. and information on how easy it is to purchase a gun. A few students knew about guns and discussed the types of guns used in the attacks. It took about 40 minutes to get around the circle.

I had prepared three things to get students to think about the incident sociologically.

First, I brought in a documentary film called *Tough Guise* featuring feminist anti-male-violence educator/activist Jackson Katz, and we watched the section called "School Shootings" that described several earlier incidents. Students were quick to note that the Virginia Tech shooter Cho Seung-Hui had eulogized Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the Columbine High School shooters, linking his own actions explicitly with theirs. Katz links the actions of shooters in general to the culture of violence that surrounds all men. He points out that when we think of the shooters as crazy, lone individuals we miss noticing how firmly violence is embedded in our cultural understanding of masculinity itself. Violence is part of what it means to be a normal male in this society; it is not just tolerated but encouraged. We had discussed gender socialization earlier in the semester and the students had already completed an assignment of identifying instances at a local shopping mall. The connection between masculinity and violence is clear in boys' toys such as guns and action figures and in violent video games which are primarily marketed toward boys.

I also shared the example of a 1989 shooting in Montreal in which a male would-be engineering student opened fire on female engineering students while yelling "you're all fucking feminists."

Fourteen women were killed in this incident; another nine women and four men were injured. The shooter, Marc Lepine, felt threatened by women entering a formerly all-male profession. Caputi and Russell (1990) point out that even if shooters are crazy themselves, their craziness took place in a cultural context that condones misogyny.

I asked students to see Cho not just as someone with personal mental health issues but as someone taking his cues from the culture at large. What, I asked, does what happened at Virginia Tech have to do with the culture in which Cho lived? How do Cho's actions reflect normalized masculine violence? I had found some statistics on the symptoms of mental illness to make the point that it is much more common than we think and thus not a very convincing explanation for violence: nearly 18 percent of respondents reported some symptoms of mental illness during the previous year.¹ Finally, the vast majority of violent behavior is carried out by those who are not considered "mentally ill."

Students seemed to take this information in stride, with no one reacting much at all to it. They probably needed time to process these points in the context of the unfolding Virginia Tech story.

Near the end of the class period, I asked students to consider the appropriateness of the media coverage. I shared my own opinion that it was overblown: while the shooting was tragic it was no threat to the democracy, as many other things going on that week were, such as funding for the war in Iraq and the actions of U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales. I saw no reason for all of the major news organizations to send their lead reporters to Virginia when there were other, much more important issues to cover. I reacted very strongly to this question. My students were not so moved.

I directed their attention to all the personal profiles of those who had died, pointing out how different it was from coverage of U.S. soldiers who die in Iraq and Afghanistan. They are about the same age as the Virginia Tech students, but we're seldom told about their hobbies, hopes, or dreams. I suggested that perhaps the difference in media interest was class-based, since college students are more likely to be middle class, and soldiers are more likely to be from working class or poor families.

Two students disagreed with me. One said the difference is that although soldiers are serving their country, they are also getting paid for a job that includes the possibility of dying. Another student, whose high school friend had died in Iraq, said she didn't think soldiers' families would welcome any more media attention, that it might feel like an invasion of privacy. When these two had finished, I summarized their disagreements, asked them if I had gotten it right, and asked if any one else had anything to add about the media coverage. In a few short minutes we had modeled civil disagreement. Students shared their points of view, disagreeing with me and with each other, and nothing unseemly happened.

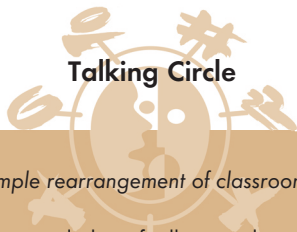
I'd been kicking myself in the hours before class started, wishing I had stuck to my syllabus, afraid that I would not be prepared enough, that the discussion would flop, and that I would have wasted a class period. But in the end, I was pleased with the way it went. Students seemed to appreciate being able to talk about the incident and had prepared themselves to do so. I got to teach some

Violence is part of what it means to be a normal male in this society; it is not just tolerated but encouraged.

¹ Weitz 2004: 184

sociology along the way. One student commended me personally, saying I was the first teacher in her experience who had ever offered to discuss something big like this as it was happening.

As a teacher, I like to have my classes well prepared, and I typically outline what will happen in class in 15-minute chunks. Events like school shootings, however, do not present themselves on a schedule. Because I am so attached to being well prepared, I have often passed up potential teaching moments like these when they have occurred. This time I had some confidence that I might be able to pull it off. I would not have had this confidence if I had not been through the *Difficult Dialogues* training.



Talking Circle

A simple rearrangement of classroom space can help open up a discussion.

The general idea of talking circles is that everyone gets a chance to speak in turn, without interruption. Sometimes a stick or other object is passed to indicate who has the floor, and allowances may be made for interruptions under certain conditions. Mostly, though, participants are encouraged to hold their thoughts until they have the floor.

Sometimes the solution to one problem just poses new problems of its own, as the following essay demonstrates. Changing the way we teach is an ongoing process of experimentation and reflection, with each new semester offering the possibility for continuing growth.

Hey – It Works! Now How Do I Stop It? (Thoughts on Taming the Beast)

Deborah Periman

*Assistant Professor of Justice
University of Alaska Anchorage*

For me, one of the most interesting consequences of the *Engaging Controversy* project occurred at the very end of spring semester. After two semesters of my experimentation with a variety of techniques to encourage dialogue in the classroom, my students turned those techniques around on me.

Every semester in one of my classes, I reserve the last three and a half hours of class time for students to give mini-lectures on some aspect of legal development. Every semester, we struggle mightily to fit all the student presentations into the time reserved.

Presentations are typically five to seven minutes long. Often, students will close with “Any questions?”—an invitation that is typically issued half-heartedly and frequently meets with a desultory response. We then move quickly on to the next presenter.

This spring, for the first time, approximately twenty percent of the students had planned a dialogue session for the end of their presentation, complete with a prepared question designed to foster discussion on a social controversy related to their projects. One student had prepared a PowerPoint slide with a list of controversial questions that the class could vote on to decide which they wanted to explore. It was delightful! To my chagrin, however, it was also a problem. The semester was running out, and for the class to respond with a fully engaged dialogue on each of the questions (which were fascinating and well chosen) would have prevented us from hearing all the students present their lectures.

The problem I faced in figuring out to handle these wonderful student-initiated discussions, for which we just did not have time, was a more painful version of a problem I had faced frequently throughout the semester. That is, how do I shut down a dialogue that represents exactly what I had asked for from the students, from which they are continuing to learn, and which we are all enjoying, when the demands of the course schedule require us to move on to something else? And how do I accomplish that a) without making the students feel that their opinions and their energy are not truly valued or that I am insincere when I ask for their thoughts; and b) without chilling response the next time I ask for a dialogue? I have no easy solution, but I do have some ideas I plan to try next semester.

In hindsight, with respect to the student presentations, I should have emphasized well ahead of time, in both the written assignment and in class, the limited opportunity for dialogue. Next semester, I will warn students that the time allocated for presentations is finite, that it is challenging to get through all the presentations in the time available, and that dialogue will inevitably be cut short so that each student has an opportunity to present his or her material.

Controlling the duration of dialogue interspersed with lecture during normal class time is more challenging, both in terms of avoiding a chilling effect on later participation and avoiding a situation in which students who are not allowed to speak feel dismissed or undervalued. Potential solutions include:

- At the beginning of the semester, make clear why student dialogue is valued and that it will be an important part of the learning process, while at the same time emphasizing that the balance between dialogue and lecture is difficult, and that productive dialogue may sometimes be interrupted in order to cover necessary course content.
- Set a time limit in advance: “Let’s take ten minutes and think about . . .”
- Warn students as time is running out: “We’ll just have time to hear from one or two more people . . .” or “We’ll have to make this our last comment.”
- Express regret when discussion is cut off: “I’m sorry there isn’t time for everyone to speak.”
- Express sincere appreciation for the students’ engagement.
- Explain the need to move on: “Our exam is next week, and we need to cover a few additional points.”
- As lecture resumes, make eye contact with students who were cut off and, to the extent appropriate, call on those students for short-answer responses.
- When time allows, reopen discussion at the end of the period, again expressing regret for having interrupted students’ thoughts previously.
- Give students an opportunity in the last five minutes of class to express their ideas on the unfinished topic by writing an ungraded response statement. This allows each student to speak, even if the instructor is the only one who will hear his or her thoughts. Alternatively, this provides a mechanism for reopening discussion in a later class, if the instructor retains the student submissions and redistributes them. These papers also provide a nice trigger for later small group discussion.

In summary, there is nothing more satisfying (and fun) than engaging a class in high-energy dialogue on a topic of importance to the students’ development in their discipline and as citizens of the larger community. It is painful to have to cut short the exchange of ideas. I hope that I can accomplish this more gracefully in the future.

STUDENT OUTCOMES

To find out if gains in faculty knowledge and comfort translated into measurable student outcomes, we queried 243 students across eleven disciplines, two universities, and three campuses. Although the “n’s” in most cases were small, the aggregate results were positive. Most of them created Codes of Conduct in their classrooms. Most of them told us they were more comfortable talking about hot topics now than they had been before. Overall, they compared their instructors favorably against others in the same university. They appreciated the techniques they’d experienced, especially Shared Writing, the Circle of Objects, and Silence.

Secondary Objective: Student Outcomes

Dr. Claudia Lampman

Professor of Psychology

University of Alaska Anchorage

Although the primary objective of our project was faculty development, the ultimate goal was to have a positive impact on our students as well. In order to examine whether students in test classes benefited from particular strategies and approaches, faculty participants were encouraged to include in their end-of-term course evaluations a set of common items that could apply to any class in which one or more of the new techniques was incorporated. The following analysis is based on data collected from 243 students in sixteen different courses and seventeen different sections.

Comfort level

Chart 1 shows how students rated their comfort level in speaking openly about difficult or controversial topics in the test class compared to other similar classes they’ve taken. They responded on a seven-point scale in which 1 = *much less comfortable than in other classes* and 7 = *much more comfortable than in other classes*. Projecting that the mean response across a random sample of similar sections would approximate the midpoint of the 7-point response scale, the obtained overall mean of 5.34 (SD = 1.34) is significantly greater than 3.5 [$t(239) = 21.32, p < .001$]. The mean comfort level reported by students was above 5.25 in every test course but one.

Effective Instructors

Similarly, Chart 2 shows student ratings on how effective their instructor was at making them feel comfortable speaking up in class, compared with other instructors they have had (where 1 = *much less effective than other instructors* and 7 = *much more effective than other instructors*). Faculty Fellows were rated as significantly higher in effectiveness than the scale midpoint of 3.5, with a mean of 5.68 (SD = 1.37), $t(239) = 24.66, p < .001$. All but one of the faculty participants were rated as quite effective at making students feel comfortable speaking up about difficult or controversial issues in class, with means ranging from 5.61 to 6.28.

Effective strategies

Finally, as shown in Chart 3, the students rated fifteen different strategies for their effectiveness in helping to create positive discussions on difficult issues or topics (where 1 = *not at all effective* and 7 = *extremely effective*). All of the strategies were rated, on average, as quite effective by students; no strategy received a mean rating below 4.25 on the 7-point scale. The strategies rated as most effective included Respecting the Silence, Shared Writing, Cocktail Party, small group discussion, community of inquiry, and Circle of Objects (all means of 5.5 or greater on a 7-point scale). These ratings suggest that students tended to feel that the strategies implemented in their classrooms did encourage positive and open dialogues on difficult or controversial subjects.

Cautions and Conclusions

Although the student ratings gathered appear to be quite positive, it is important to keep a couple of things in mind when thinking about these data. First, not all of our faculty participants requested these ratings from their students, so it is difficult to generalize to the entire cohort. Second, students were not asked to complete pre-course ratings about their feelings or comfort levels in these or other courses at the beginning of the semester. With only post-test ratings, it is impossible to pinpoint change in levels of comfort. Finally, the data is self-reported in nature. Classroom observations would also be important to truly assess the degree to which difficult dialogues actually occurred.

Nonetheless, these data do suggest that the faculty who participated in this initiative were effective in creating classroom environments where students felt comfortable. It would be worthwhile to conduct more rigorous assessment of student outcomes in future efforts.

Chart 1 Compared to other, similar classes you have taken at APU/UAA, how comfortable did you feel in this class speaking openly about difficult or controversial topics?

1=much less comfortable to 7=much more comfortable

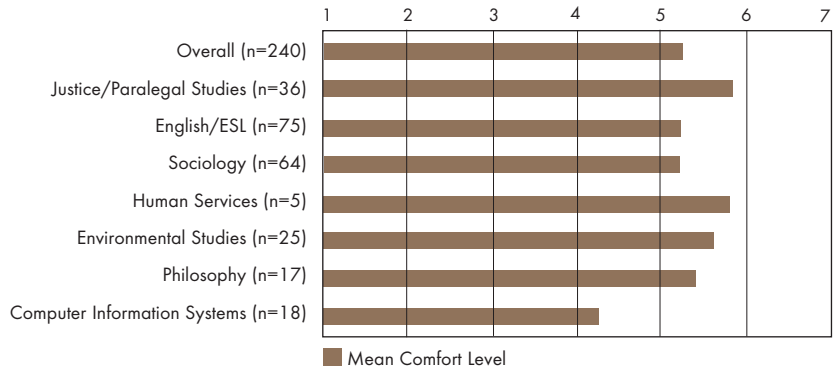


Chart 2 Compared to other instructors you have had at APU/UAA, how effective was this instructor in making students feel comfortable speaking up in class about difficult or controversial topics?

1=much less effective to 7=extremely effective

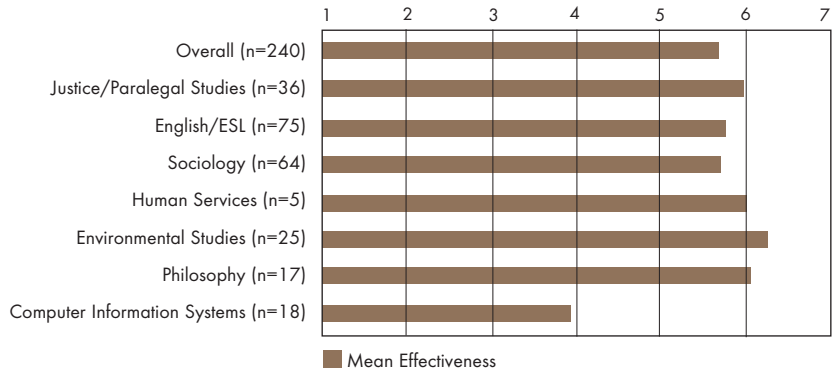
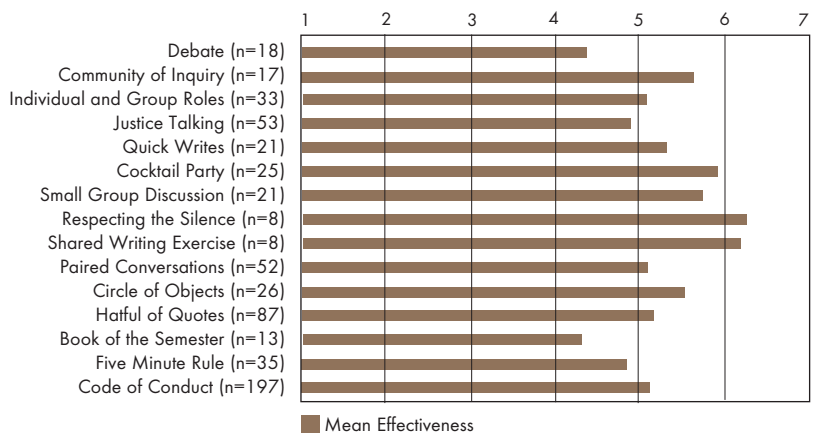


Chart 3 How effective was this strategy/technique for creating positive discussions on difficult issues or topics?

1=not at all effective to 7=extremely effective



Course design is an obvious place to begin if you hope to effect changes in your students. This essay describes a course designed to deliberately engage a controversial topic in order to challenge students to take intellectual risks. Because students respond differently to taking risks, a variety of techniques are employed to encourage participation at the level of risk that they can personally handle. This creates a mutually safe space for all students in which they can challenge their own assumptions and consider an issue beyond their first gut reaction to an intellectual place of reasoned conclusions and broadened perspectives.

Transforming Students

Dr. Leslie Cornick

*Associate Professor of Marine Biology and Statistics
Alaska Pacific University*

Few topics are as controversial among marine biology students as whaling. Students typically have very strong feelings about the special nature of whales and their status as icons of the marine conservation movement. They also tend to have little sympathy for whalers and the international agencies that manage and regulate nonwhaling and whaling nations alike. If the techniques we learned in the *Difficult Dialogues* project were as effective as I hoped they would be, they would help students objectively consider more than one perspective on whaling and come to reasoned conclusions—rather than emotional reaction—about its practice. The annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) in Anchorage last year provided a perfect opportunity to test the hypothesis that equipped with the right tools, students could—and would—take the intellectual risk of engaging in objective civil discourse with proponents and opponents of whaling on a number of scales (subsistence, scientific, commercial).

To coincide with the IWC meetings, I offered a special topics course entitled Whaling: Past, Present and Future. The sophomore-junior course examined whaling from historical, ecological, cultural, literary, and policy perspectives, and included readings, videos, a museum field trip, and guest speakers from a variety of constituencies in the IWC. We covered the complete spectrum of international attitudes about whaling, from Greenpeace (ban all whaling except carefully managed subsistence use), to nations like the United States with only local subsistence hunts (e.g., Alaska Native bowhead hunts) that are supported by the IWC members, to nations like Japan that practice scientific whaling under special permits, and those like Norway that continue a commercial harvest under objection to the current moratorium on commercial whaling.

I used a variety of techniques to facilitate discussion, but the most important of these turned out to be having the students keep a personal journal of their thoughts, perceptions, and responses to the materials covered in class. The journals allowed students to examine their ideas and perceptions privately before joining the class discussion, and also to decide which parts of their response to share with their classmates or to share only with me as I read their journals. The journals also provided a venue for formulating questions for guest speakers prior to their visits, following discussion of their published works.

To establish a baseline for their attitudes, perceptions, and civil discourse skills, I asked them in their first journaling assignment to describe their current understanding of whaling and their feelings and/or opinions about it. The majority opinion is vividly captured in the following excerpts from student writings:

- *“I think whaling is wrong...”*
- *“There is no need for it anymore with all the other food sources available...”*
- *“Although Natives used to be traditional hunters of whales [they now] seem to have turned into sport hunters...they use modern technology instead of old fashioned ways, which I think is wrong and immoral.”*
- *“Japan is industrialized enough, but whaling makes them seem primitive.”*

For the next four weeks, students wrote personal responses to each video, field trip, and guest speaker in their journals, and each set of readings was tied to an in-class discussion exercise using dyads, Quick Writes, small group discussion, and other techniques. The exposure to so many different perspectives challenged them to examine their own assumptions and biases, and they were transformed in ways that were surprising and thrilling. The process was a slow one, with new ideas being considered and incorporated into students’ perceptions as each new experience built upon previous ones. This developmental process is illustrated by the small changes from week to week in the students’ journaling, and ultimately in their willingness to take those intellectual risks in open discussion with the class, as well as their willingness to pose difficult questions to guest speakers.

An early field trip brought them to the Anchorage Museum of History and Art to see two photographic displays of Alaska Native whaling culture that were part of a special exhibit entitled *A Summer of Whales*. One display consisted of historical photographs; the other was from a recent expedition specifically aimed

at chronicling the cultural significance of the hunt. This visual exposure to actual whale hunts, as opposed to the hunts they imagined, produced palpable changes:

- *“...actually seeing pictures of it...will help me understand the sustainable whaling a little more...not sure if I approve of it or not – [but it’s] not like I need to give them permission...”*
- *“It did not look modernized the way I pictured it. I thought they were using gas-powered boats and guns...but they still hold to their traditions. I liked seeing that it still took many people working together to pull the whale up, it shows a trust between them by having to rely on each other... seeing it through pictures lets you see what really goes on, which was a lot different than I thought.”*

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Early guest speakers included two members of the IWC's Scientific Committee who were out-spokenly critical of Japan's scientific whaling program and the "small-scale coastal whaling" Japan was proposing to start. These presentations tended to reinforce the anti-whaling sentiment in the room and by the third week of the course, when Japan's Commissioner to the IWC was scheduled to appear, the students were feeling bold and ready to discredit him. The day before his visit, however, I asked them to read a paper defending Japan's programs, and to respond to it in their journals as if they had no previous knowledge of whaling issues. The goal of this prompt was to challenge students to try to ignore their own preconceptions and consider the argument on its merits. This is a difficult, if not impossible, task for anyone; but more so for young undergraduate students, many of whom may be unaware of how often preconceptions color our ability to consider challenging ideas with an open mind. I didn't expect them to succeed necessarily, but I did want them to recognize and face their own prior judgments.

The commissioner's visit was interesting—he was clearly experienced at presenting the Japanese perspective to hostile audiences. He spoke flawless English, was even-tempered and cordial, and presented his well-rehearsed argument in a confident and persuasive manner, taking a cultural anthropological perspective: "Would India ask the United States not to eat beef?" I specifically refrained from participating in the discussion as much as possible so that the students would engage directly with the commissioner, rather than relying on me as an intermediary. With only a touch of visible trepidation, the students asked pointed questions about Japan's scientific whaling program ("Can't you get the same information with nonlethal methods given current technology?") and their extensive promotion of whale meat in school lunch programs ("Knowing that whale meat is contaminated with mercury and other dangerous compounds, how can you push it on your school-children?"). The commissioner answered the questions with the aplomb of a seasoned politician—essentially not answering the contamination question, and insisting that lethal methods are necessary to collect population and age data (an assertion that U.S. scientists refute).

After the commissioner had come and gone, I asked students to reflect again on their perceptions of Japan's whaling program and to include their personal responses to the commissioner. Again, it was easy to see them wrestling with their perceptions and developing their ideas:

- *"Japan, unlike subsistence whaling villages, doesn't need the protein source from whale meat...however, is it really appropriate to deny them a food source on the basis that there are alternatives? Although I didn't necessarily agree with all of the points (the commissioner) made, I did find myself reevaluating some of my perspectives on the whaling issue because of what he said."*
- *"One nation cannot dictate what another chooses to do without infringing on their sovereignty...Japan is patronized as being barbaric since whale meat is used as a food source much like subsistence hunters in Alaska, but Native Alaskans are seen as living in harmony with their surroundings – why the double standard?"*
- *"I think they (Japan) are being set up to look bad..."*

By the end of the course, students were asked to reconsider their position on whaling issues, including commercial, subsistence and scientific hunts. Among the most dramatic transformations occurred in the student who, at the start of the course, was most vehemently opposed to all forms of whaling:

"Subsistence hunting I am not against, not supportive of it, but I can't come up with a good reason why they shouldn't. Scientific whaling, I can go either way—if it produces some valuable data that we can't get any other way, then I feel it is okay as long as the population is not diminished in any way... I have enjoyed hearing other points of view, and even changing my own a little bit."

Other students experienced similar expansion of their perspectives:

- *“A lot of interesting topics that made me question things I thought I already knew...”*
- *“I am still unsure where I stand on whaling, but I almost think it is just taking the easy way out to say whaling should be banned everywhere and in all forms...”*
- *“Other cultures that see whaling as a historical part of their way of life deserve consideration...even if they are industrialized...”*
- *“I think it is important to be well informed and get all sides of an issue before making judgments or decisions. I now feel that I have a very solid, well-rounded perspective on the issue. It hasn't really made it easier to pick a side or decide exactly what my feelings are. I don't think it is a black and white issue at all.”*

In a mere four weeks, with the right tools and opportunities, these brave students questioned their assumptions and examined their personal biases, engaged in open and respectful civil discourse with international scholars and diplomats on one of the most controversial issues in marine conservation, and came away with expanded perspectives. Not all of the students changed their minds about whaling, and that wasn't the ultimate goal of the course. However, the process transformed these students from young people with very strong opinions that they had little interest in revising into thoughtful citizens willing to consider the opinions and perspectives of others, even when they were initially horrified by them.

Reflective Writing (Journals)



Personal journals are an effective and safe space for students to consider and develop their ideas about controversial issues before discussing them with the class.

Writing

Consider asking students to write something every day. Examples include answers to a specific question posed as homework: comments on a reading, video, or guest speaker: or simple free-writes describing their reactions to that day's discussion.

Confidentiality

Assure them that the instructor is the only person who will see their journal, and that it is up to them to choose how much to share with the rest of the class.

Open discussion

If you plan to share selections anonymously with the class, first get the class's consent. Passages should be transcribed onto separate media such as a typed handout or PowerPoint slide so that students cannot identify other students' work by seeing the journal from which a particular passage is read.

OVERALL OUTCOMES

We knew the overall outcomes for individuals would be uneven, and they were. Some of us got far more out of the experience than others. But in spite of all the risks, the extra work, and the aggravations that go along with trying something new and making it up as you go along, most of us would agree that this project has done our institutions a huge amount of good. We've come a long way together, and today we are in a much stronger place than we were when we first started talking.

We have developed a shared language, a shared culture, and a shared awareness among a growing number of people—not only the faculty, but also administrators, staff, students, and our families and friends—about something called difficult dialogues. Our partnerships have been strengthened. We're a little less isolated now, and a little more skilled. Today when we encounter—or engage—a difficult dialogue we have more people in the game, and the assurance that someone will offer a better way to respond as a result of this experience.

In the end, difficult dialogues—however well prepared for, however well managed—are still difficult. They're about our identities and our cultures, about power and inequality and who gets to decide how things are and where we're going from here. On the presenting level, they're about religion and politics and science and tradition. But underneath, they're about those deeper human needs we're all trying to get met: security, respect, to be valued, to be part of a community, to contribute to the ongoing conversation of our times.

Difficult dialogues are the things that usually force us apart, but for this year they were also the things that brought us together. Looking forward, we hope they will continue to be a catalyst for strengthening our teaching, engaging our students, and making our campuses better places for learning and the free exchange of ideas. As we make more room for difficult dialogues in our classrooms and communities, we should be encouraged by the words of Clark Kerr, who spoke these words at the University of California at Berkeley many years ago: “The university is not engaged in making ideas safe for students. It is engaged in making students safe for ideas.”

START TALKING

Questions for Discussion:

What are the core controversies in your organization that everyone is aware of but no one wants to talk about?

How could you redesign one or more of your courses to incorporate more active learning and a deeper engagement with multiple perspectives?

How could you begin a difficult dialogues program in your own department?

What are you willing to risk in the interests of strengthening your teaching?



Keep Talking

***Be the change you wish
to see in the world.***

Gandhi

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FACULTY INTENSIVE

The One We Didn't Choose

In early project planning, when we first started talking about a joint Books of the Year program, we were thinking in general terms, not about any specific issue or topic. We wanted a book that would stir a little controversy, but we didn't want something that would generate controversies we did not yet have the skills to handle productively. It was easy to think of potential book titles, and our steering committee spent several lively hours brainstorming through our collective favorites. *White Teeth!* *Red Mars!* *The Poisonwood Bible!* *The Satanic Verses!* Most of us were taking notes for our own summer reading. Say, what was *The Satanic Verses* about again anyway? Some of us remembered the fatwa against author Salman Rushdie, but not the plot of the book.

Because we wanted books that would engage our faculties, we asked for their help in nominating titles. Over the next couple of months, a faculty committee reviewed thirty-five nominations, short-listed eight, and finally recommended four to the steering committee, who then made the final selection.

The two books we chose made a rough pair, loosely tied to themes of culture, immigration, language, and survival. All these are issues Alaskans face; both books we chose were set in California. *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* is a nonfiction account of a Hmong family in central California and *The Tortilla Curtain* is a tragicomic novel about Mexicans and Americans in the canyons around Los Angeles. Both books are complex, accessible, tonally neutral and brilliantly written explorations of the deep rifts between colliding cultures. Both turned out to be excellent choices for a wide range of classrooms, topics, and reading levels.

But we still had some unfinished business with the book we didn't choose. *Ordinary Wolves* by Seth Kantner is, by all accounts, a gritty but lyrical novel about growing up on the Yukon Delta in western Alaska. We didn't choose it, even though it was the top recommendation—and the only unanimous choice—of our faculty committee. We didn't choose it, even though those who'd read it said it was amazing. We didn't choose it, even though it was about Alaska, and we knew it would have an immediate relevance to our students. We didn't choose it because it was written by a white man, and we were concerned that it would spawn some difficult dialogues that neither campus was adequately prepared to address.

White people and others in the dominant American culture have been holding the strings of power over indigenous peoples in the Americas for hundreds of years. The dominant culture creates and enforces the public policies (including land management, resource extraction, economic development, education, and social welfare) that largely determine how Native people must live. It also largely determines how Native people have been perceived. In choosing not to choose this book, we simply recognized that white people (including teachers, artists, novelists, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, travel writers, scientists, and priests) have been telling stories about Native people's lives through non-Native eyes for centuries. We were afraid that if we chose "another one of those" we might be perpetuating an old problem instead of looking ahead to a new solution. We didn't want to go there, at least not yet. We certainly didn't want to start there.

INTEGRATION OF ACADEMIC AND ALASKA NATIVE CULTURES

Fast forward two years. Our third faculty intensive, in May 2007, was different from the first two. We'd learned a lot and could do a better job of nurturing community, presenting topics, introducing strategies, and engaging the group. The group had greater ethnic diversity, and the presenters took a more intentional stance with regard to minority cultures and points of view. Because of this, we had a chance to go where we hadn't gone before.

Our facilitator, Libby Roderick, announced to the group on Monday afternoon that over the course of the week they'd be given time to plan a discussion around a real difficult dialogue chosen by the group. We brainstormed a list of potential topics and used a repetitive voting exercise to narrow it down to a single issue: whether our universities ought to privilege research over teaching. We broke the sixteen participants into groups of four and asked each group to develop a 75-minute course module that would address the topic, incorporate some of the strategies and techniques presented in the intensive, and bring in any others the group wanted to model. On the final day the groups would present their proposals and the participants would vote for the one they wanted to experience. That group would then lead the others through their exercises. The intention of this assignment was threefold: 1) to help participants integrate new approaches into their own thought processes; 2) to help them actively imagine how to create classes that might address difficult dialogues within their own disciplines; and 3) to give them a chance to participate in a real difficult dialogue where something was actually at stake.

A number of the participants privately expressed their disappointment over the innocuous nature of the chosen topic; while the research versus teaching question may be a major point of contention in some higher education circles, it wasn't really that controversial here. Several were disappointed that some of the topics with wider implications (especially the suggested proposition that both universities should hire faculty in numbers that reflect the ethnic demographics of their community) had been rejected by the group in favor of a highly academic topic.

As the week progressed, a different issue kept surfacing: the discrimination and invisibility experienced by Alaska Native people, both within Alaskan universities and beyond. This third cohort included one Alaska Native professor who was willing to speak out on a wide range of experiences and conflicts and who, with the support of the facilitator, voiced these concerns at some length. During one of these discussions, at a pivotal moment, Libby asked the group if they would be willing to change their difficult dialogue topic from teaching versus research to one related to Native cultures and higher education. Everyone immediately agreed, and the group jointly constructed a new question to debate: "Should all Alaska university faculty, researchers, and scientists be required to attend an Alaska Native-designed and run cultural orientation program?" The small groups began creating modules around this new topic.

On the final day, the groups presented their proposals and voted on which to put into practice that day. The approach selected was structured around six techniques that all began with the letter "d": Depiction, Dyads, Discussion, Documentary, Debate, and Debriefing. It started with a fictional scenario, in which the administrators at both of our universities had mandated that all faculty members attend a week-long Alaska Native-designed and run cultural orientation program as part of their contracts. The announcer described the enormous backlash this hypothetical mandate had created, with students, faculty, and community members in an uproar of protest. Thousands of angry e-mails had been sent to university administrators; some faculty had signed a petition insisting that

the policy be withdrawn, and others had resigned in outrage. Those of us in the room were to imagine ourselves as attendees at the public gathering that had been called for all university and community members to learn more about the policy and the issues at stake, and to engage in a dialogue about whether it should be continued.

The group led us through various exercises designed to help the “meeting attendees” become more informed about the history of Native cultures with respect to Western systems of education, the differences between Native and non-Native ways of thinking and learning, and our own biases. The final exercise was a modular debate. The group leaders divided those present into five small groups and assigned them to represent one of five constituencies: students, faculty, union leaders, university administrators, and Alaska Native elders. The constituent groups were to meet together briefly, establish their position on the question (for, against, or split), and prepare themselves to represent the opinions and positions of their constituencies to the larger group.

When the large group reconvened, each constituency was given a brief opportunity to articulate its positions and concerns. The administrators were in favor, the faculty leaders opposed, and the students, faculty, and Native elders were each split. After each turn, the broader group had an opportunity to ask questions and hear responses about that constituency’s positions. No winners were proclaimed, but there were several moving moments and illuminating exchanges, including the Native professor struggling to respond as his own father, a Native elder, might have. All participants came away with a heightened understanding of the various perspectives and concerns and a deepened appreciation of the need for actually talking about these things, regardless of which side prevailed in terms of an actual policy decision.

The discussion was so successful that the project team felt ready to have this conversation in public. In the fall, we held a public event that featured a four-person panel (three professors and a Native community leader) and four freshmen from the UAA Seawolf Debate Team. The students engaged the question in a parliamentary style debate, with two speakers for the proposition and two against. The panelists followed with short prepared remarks. After these two formal airings of opinion, a facilitator opened up the discussion to audience members.

These experiences represent the beginning of the possibility of real dialogue between our two universities and the broader Alaska Native community, a potential which we hope to realize on our campuses in coming months and years. We are ready to at least start this conversation now, and with the lessons learned over the past two years, we hope we are ready to move it to a deeper level of dialogue, understanding, and action.

Modular Debate

A form of debate that demonstrates multiple perspectives (rather than just two) and engages an entire classroom (rather than only a few students at a time).

- Identify the issue and frame the proposition. (see pages 54-55)
- Identify various constituencies who might hold different positions on the proposition.
- Assign students to a constituency (or let them self-select) and ask them to identify and/or research the positions of that group.
- Conduct the debate, allowing equal time for each constituency group to present its views.

ALASKA'S NATIVE PEOPLES: A CALL TO UNDERSTANDING

As the next step in introducing Alaska Native issues to a larger university and community audience, we have chosen a theme for our 2008-09 Books of the Year that focuses on “Alaska’s Native Peoples: A Call to Understanding.” A joint faculty committee from both universities chose two books already in print, and a group of faculty and Anchorage community members created a companion volume of frequently asked questions about the Alaska Native experience. These three books create a strong set for teaching and provide an introduction to the range of voices and issues related to Alaska Native cultures and communities today. All three are nonfiction works that address critical issues, correct historical and other inaccuracies, and authentically represent the Alaska Native cultures and peoples. The companion reader also offers links to selected creative writing by Alaska Native authors. All three books are short, appropriate for many different disciplines, and accessible to students from many backgrounds.

We plan to host many related activities throughout the academic year, including forums, guest speakers, theater events, and more. We are very excited to be, at long last, bringing considerable visibility to these critically important issues on both our campuses, and to begin having some long overdue difficult dialogues on them.



Using a Book to Explore Alaska Native Issues

A few ideas for engaging with a book.

Sentence completion

Referring to all or parts of a book, ask students to take out a sheet of paper and complete the following sentences:

- The story that struck me most in this book/section was...
- The question I would most like to ask the author is...
- In order to begin talking about the issues raised in this book/section, the most relevant (name your discipline) terms would be...

Out-of-class events/exhibitions

Ask students to attend a lecture, art exhibit, or public policy meeting on a topic related to one or more of the books. Ask students to identify the issues brought up in the out-of-class event that are also discussed in the books.

Hatful of Quotes

Type out sentences or passages from the books and put them in a hat. Have students draw papers from the hat. Letting them decide who will go first, ask students to read their quote and comment on what it means.

Circle of Objects

Use a version of the Circle of Objects to illuminate one or more of the themes in the books.

BOOKS OF THE YEAR, 2008-09

Growing Up Native in Alaska

– A. J. McClanahan

This book includes interviews with twenty-seven young Alaska Native leaders about their lives, their futures, the impact of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), and how they are “finding innovative and creative ways to live in two worlds.”

Yuuyaraq: The Way of the Human Being

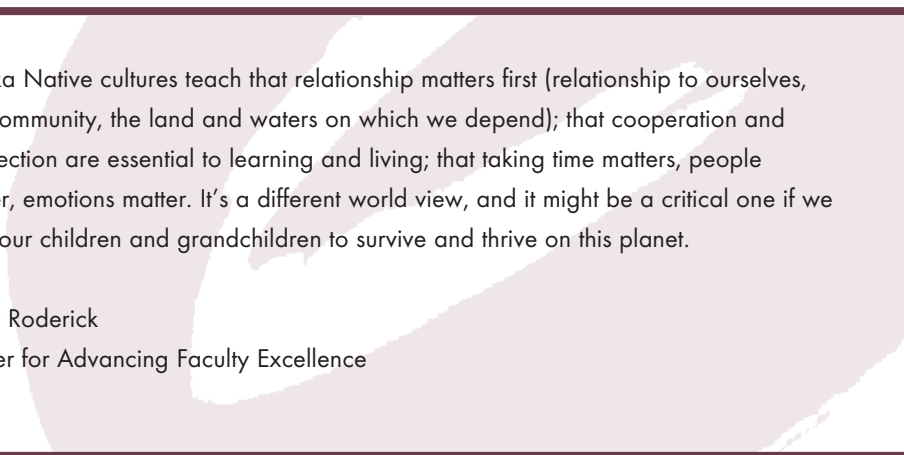
– Harold Napoleon

This book outlines the initial effects and continuing impact of the epidemics that afflicted Alaska Native peoples from the 1770s through the 1940s. Napoleon’s premise is that this death on a massive scale wiped out the culture-bearers and left psychological and spiritual scars that continue today. Routes to healing are also discussed.

Why Do Alaska Natives Get Free Medical Care (and other frequently asked questions about Alaska Native issues)

– Edited by Libby Roderick

This book of readings was prepared by UAA and APU faculty and Anchorage community members as a companion volume to the Books of the Year. It provides responses to common questions about Alaska Native issues, including identity; language and culture; subsistence; the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA); the effects of colonialism; education; health care; and the future. It also includes suggestions for additional reading, and will be available both in hard copy and online.



Alaska Native cultures teach that relationship matters first (relationship to ourselves, our community, the land and waters on which we depend); that cooperation and connection are essential to learning and living; that taking time matters, people matter, emotions matter. It’s a different world view, and it might be a critical one if we wish our children and grandchildren to survive and thrive on this planet.

Libby Roderick

Center for Advancing Faculty Excellence

LESSONS LEARNED/NEW BEGINNINGS

As the grant-funded portion of the APU/UAA Engaging Controversy project draws to a close, and the institutionally supported efforts move forward, we are faced with questions of sustainability and momentum familiar throughout academia. How do you keep a critical project going once your grant funding goes away? How do you sustain your momentum and build on it to achieve even greater success? Like many of the big questions we have faced over the last two years, we don't have all the answers. All we know is that we have to try.

We also have the value of a great many important lessons hammered home over the three years of this project. We know much of what it takes to engage difficult dialogues in higher education. Among other things, it takes:

- **The ethics to prepare carefully.** Anticipate everything you can think of, plan for every eventuality. Consult with as many people as you can; more minds are smarter than fewer minds. Have planned strategies and backup strategies, little things you can do such as dyads or Quick Writes or silences that buy you time to think. Once you engage in a difficult dialogue, stay flexible. Drop your plan and respond in real time to important issues that come up on their own.
- **The courage to make mistakes.** All good teachers know that trying new things is risky. Mistakes are to be expected. If you can't make mistakes, you won't get learning, and if you don't get learning, you're never going to change anything. So we need to support each other to make mistakes and to learn from them.
- **The humility to stand corrected.** If you say or do something that inadvertently hurts someone, you may get corrected. Listen to these corrections. Acknowledge your mistakes. Apologize.
- **The willingness to try again.** This brings us back to the core values of civil discourse: the principle of nonviolence and the willingness to stay in the game. Avoidance is not the answer, and waiting is the same as not doing. So learn from every experience, and then keep talking.

We expected this *Difficult Dialogues* project to have a dramatic positive impact on our faculty, on our students, and in our classrooms—and it has. Even more remarkable is the effect it continues to have on how we approach all of our dialogues: in faculty governance groups, with our state and municipal governments, and in addressing the ongoing challenges of being a welcoming place for Alaska Native faculty, students, and community members.

Dr. Michael A. Driscoll
Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
University of Alaska Anchorage

EPILOGUE

Our project's success was due in part to the fact that it allowed us to speak to the varying needs of at least three major (often overlapping) groups of stakeholders in the university communities: those who view institutions of higher education primarily as sources for liberal educations; those who view them largely as training grounds for workers; and those who see them as “necessary evils” for accommodating to the dominant society.

First, this project exemplifies one of the primary things a university has to offer: a liberal education. Those who experience a liberal education encounter knowledge from different disciplines and cultures and thus experience different ways of making knowledge. They have the opportunity to encounter new ideas and perspectives, make new discoveries and connections, learn mind-blowing things and possibilities, and, with a little luck, grow into more sensitive, self-reflexive citizens who can tolerate the tension of the many paradoxes in the multiple realities that surround them. For those who view the university primarily as a place to offer and acquire a liberal education, the *Engaging Controversy* project was a rare and precious opportunity to fulfill the loftiest ideals of higher education.

Another stated or unstated purpose of many institutions of higher education is to prepare students for the work force. While universities can and do help prepare students for the work force by teaching them specialized skills, they must also prepare them to navigate the disparate and the unexpected by enabling them to question, evaluate, reflect, and act. This project gave faculty members the incentive to make room for activities that do just that, thereby satisfying some of the needs and desires of the workforce development constituency.

Finally, particularly amongst minority and working class communities, there exists a view of the university as a primary instrument of assimilation into the social and economic status quo. While people in these communities may recognize the necessity of acquiring the skills to survive in the dominant economy, they may also resent or fear the accompanying losses that attend having to adapt to the values and ways of the dominant culture. The project allowed these perspectives to be aired, stimulating necessary and, we hope, ongoing discussions and institutional change.

In the end, we came a long way toward realizing the potential for our universities to be places of profound learning, of courageous inquiry, of deep transformation: all the things we say they are and try to make them be for our students, faculty, staff, administrators, and community partners. We believe this is the most appropriate use of our academic freedom—holding honest difficult dialogues about critically important issues that make or break our civil society, and doing so openly, democratically, nonviolently, and productively. We thank the Ford Foundation for giving us this opportunity.

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This book tells the story of a partnership between two universities who have spent several years exploring productive ways to engage difficult dialogues in classroom and other academic settings.

It presents a model for a faculty development intensive, strategies for engaging controversial topics in the classroom, and reflections from thirty-five faculty and staff members who have field-tested the techniques. It is intended as a conversation-starter and field manual for professors and teachers who want to strengthen their teaching and engage their students more effectively in conversations about the most important issues of our time.

