BEST PRACTICES TOOL #4B[1]
How to Engage in Discussions of Differences Such as Race[2]
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In a sequel to Tool #4A, we outline here the best practices for discussing 'differences' in the method of practice and teaching (pedagogy) and being attentive to the instructor's demographics.[1] It is intended to serve as a guide and does not represent official Purdue University policy.

Instructors' experiences with teaching and interactions with students, both within and outside the classroom, are sites within which differences of race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, and nationality, among others play out in critical ways, and must be given due consideration. Additional reasons for engaging in discussions of race are elaborated in Tool #4A. We rely on scholarship and our own experiences to suggest best practices that can be useful for all instructors.

All of us (authors) are at Purdue; a campus that is predominantly White, much like the state in which the University is located. As scholars, we are grounded in approaches, methods, and politics of intersectionality but we are foregrounding race in this Tool and underscoring that race is relational and is always complicated by other factors such as, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, and nationality. Our suggestions are by no means exhaustive, but they are relevant to what many of us strive for as a campus community. To reiterate what we noted in Tool #4A: you may ask, what if I get it wrong? You will. Try again. Be resilient. Don't beat yourself up about it. Instead, plan to do better next time. Use every opportunity to learn through conversations and by reading. You don't have to do something big; you can start with small things. Small things do matter.

This Tool is organized in four sections: discussing difference in teaching/learning contexts, syllabus and protocols, conversations within the classroom and during office hours, and course assessment and feedback conversations. The best practices apply in the case of both graduate and undergraduate students. Refer to the glossary in Appendix A of Tool #4A. We draw on the concept of courageous conversations introduced in Tool #4A and reiterate the main points below.

Courageous conversation forums can be a constructive effort on campuses when they allow participants to:[4]
- Gain some knowledge about a topic (gender and/or race/ethnicity, culture, sexuality).
- Broaden their perspective.
- Establish trust to move forward.
- Consider questions such as: What is/are the pressing issue/s? How is/are these issues affecting you and/or others around you? What will the future be like if nothing changes?

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[1] This Tool is intended to serve as a guide and represents the views of the authors based on scholarship and their experiences. This document does not represent official Purdue University policy.

What do you see as your responsibility in this issue? What is the one thing we cannot fail to do to make things better for us?

Discussing Difference in Teaching/Learning Contexts
A key enterprise of universities is education; and this platform can be harnessed to enrich discussions of difference. The best practices noted in this section are relevant for faculty, staff, and students particularly because our lives are intertwined on campus and beyond, including within our disciplines. Additionally, students are encountering an increasingly diverse and globalizing world; so being aware and being able to navigate diverse professional careers and responsibilities is a key aspect of education.

Preparation
- In the first step to prepare, we suggest undertaking a self-assessment. Consider your own emotional-intellectual-political bandwidth for doing the labor to engage in a courageous conversation about differences with others. Perhaps acknowledge that your subject position might already place an "undue burden" on you to do this kind of labor, or you might be better placed within an institution to address inequity. Also, consider how you might best find a balance between your pedagogical obligation and your personal precarity/privilege.[5]
- In doing so, it may be useful to consider the possibility of failure. You might not always succeed at convincing your interlocutor about the need for the difficult conversation, or even get them to move their position on a particular issue; even so, engage in these "teachable moments" so that you don't leave them to be addressed by someone with less power or knowledge about the subject than you have. As a general principle, refrain from discounting the possibility of having a long-term impact on a student's thinking, even if, in the short-term they remain unconvinced.
- Try to expect reciprocity. That is, don't shy away from your commitment to engage in courageous conversations, but also don't shy away from demanding that your students need to reciprocate that commitment towards you and towards each other.
- Think in advance about normalizing the idea of the classroom as a brave space. Consider what pedagogical choices are available to assist you with making this possible.
- Consider asking yourself the following: What different perspectives and viewpoints are included in the course content? Keep in mind citational diversity as well as substantive areas as they intersect with gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, neurodiversity, and other topics for discussion and engagement. Before the course even begins, consider which topics may result in courageous conversations and identify ways in which you might want to approach these.[6]
- Think carefully about the limits of collective norming and ways to counteract them. For instance, being attentive to the possibility that collective norms might instate a civility discourse that often equalizes harm (where harm is not equal); delegitimizes the justified agitation of marginalized students; legitimizes oppressiveness when its 'polite'. Collective norming is the process by which behaviors, discourses, and practices are collectively reflected upon, defined, held up, and practiced. Consider the most ethical way in which to establish these. For example, consider the implications of the norm "respect all opinions in the classroom." How will this norm play out if, and when, a student says something sexist/racist/transphobic in the classroom? How would you hold/create space in the classroom for yourself and other students to reject that opinion?

- We suggest being clear about expectations. If you have students working in your lab, it would be useful to spell out lab policies or perhaps an agreement. Students may not always be fully prepared for graduate schools.
- Consider how you want to be addressed by students and what you would say to the students especially because of the gendered ways that students address instructors. And the reverse is also true, that is whether and how instructors in turn address students by their names. This connotes respect for instructors and students. It is about being inclusive.
  - We suggest informing students about how you (instructor) expect to be addressed: as Dr. Last Name; Professor Last Name; First name; or in the case of graduate students, the first name or Ms. Last Name. This is key because students tend to refer to male instructors as "Dr." and women instructors as "Miss," Ms., or by their first name. Furthermore, students tend to use only the first name of instructors who identify as women.
  - Similarly, instructors must review their course rosters to go over the names of the students in their classes. Instructors who don't learn how to pronounce students' names send a message to the whole class that a particular student is not important.
  - Another aspect of using and saying names of some is also related to how they are addressed in emails by students. We've seen or are familiar with an email that may begin with, "Dear Professor Joan Smith and Anita" or "Dear Professor John Smith and Anita or "Dear Anita" despite both persons being faculty members. This is a common experience for women faculty members of color based in the intersections of gender and race or ethnicity. This is clearly a sign of disrespect of the status of the as well as the recognition of expertise/knowledge of the faculty member – woman or woman of color.
  - Be consistent in addressing faculty – all first names, or all Dr. and last name, or all Professors and last name.

Syllabus and Protocols[7]
In the first part of this section, we provide best practices in developing a syllabus. This in no way overrides the requirements laid out by the university. Here, we refer to mainly the content of the syllabus and what may be helpful to spell out on syllabus day.
- For developing an inclusive syllabus refer to The Inclusive Syllabus Project.
- In the syllabus, include policies and procedures regarding academic integrity and misconduct as per university policies, particularly as it regards course materials and assignment.
  - Personalize policies: Consider presenting policies not simply as university-required, bureaucratic legalese. Be attentive to the differentially distributed nature of the needs of students.
  - Consider including a classroom conduct policy in the syllabus and mention 'difference.' Example: "Each one of us has varying experiences with respect to gender, race, ethnicity, and overall social relations, and each of us is likely to have different opinions about what is right and wrong in these cases. Therefore, think about what you read, listen to what others have to say, and certainly respond with your questions and/or comments to learn about and understand the topic. This course views the classroom as the best place to begin to understand differences as a first step to build bridges across different groups of people. Most importantly, this class is an opportunity to learn more about your own self by learning more about other people. Here's the bottom line: You don't have to agree with what someone says, but you must be respectful of others. No put-downs, sarcasm, ridicule, or similar attempts, to intimidate, degrade, or insult another person will be allowed. In

addition, showing respect for other students means refraining from private conversations, making efforts to engage quiet or passive group members, etc."
- ○ Consider addressing directly in the syllabus a policy on microaggressions and racist actions and comments.[8]
- In the syllabus, you could express confidence that all students can do well in the course and consider suggesting strategies for success, such as reading assigned material, being attentive to discussion questions addressed in the class or asking questions in the class or during office hours.
- Making your expectations explicit in the syllabus will help students. For example, if you have participation requirements, take the time to unpack what participation means in your course, the many ways in which students can participate. Make it known to students that you've taken the time to consider how you will support and involve students who might be hesitant to participate verbally and discuss why participation is important for the course and why it will help students maximize what and how they can learn in the course. Examples, some students may be hesitant to speak in class; so, provide everyone in the class the opportunity to provide written comments at the end of the class session. Be consistent in providing the same opportunity to all.
- Use policies to invite students to reach out to you if they feel comfortable, particularly in relation to food and housing insecurity, acknowledge inequity of resources, difficulty in accessing technology etc. Share any university or department/college resources, including mental health resources, that the student might benefit from knowing and taking the time to point these out on syllabus day.
- Consider reviewing and implementing Universities Canada Principles on Indigenous Education Available at https://sass.uottawa.ca/en/aboriginal/principles and https://teachingcommons.lakeheadu.ca/sites/default/files/inlinefiles/ACDE_Accord_on_Indigenous_Education_0.pdf.

Suggested Protocols
The protocols we suggest are intended to enable the instructor to consider various aspects of what may unfold through the semester.
- Introductions: Think about introducing yourself, keeping inclusiveness in mind. For example, consider mentioning preferred pronouns and other ways that you're comfortable making transparent/explicit your own subject position, so as to denaturalize the 'given-ness' of identities and the assumptions we make. Also invite students to do the same if/when they feel safe. As noted above, women faculty may want to indicate how they should be addressed – Professor, Dr. and not Ms.
- Consider creating classroom ground rules, norms, and protocols with your students in the first week of class. Protocols may include but are not limited to: showing respect for others, respecting the instructor/speaker, listening carefully, not generalizing about groups or asking another person to speak for a group, creating a supportive atmosphere of learning, being open to other intellectual perspectives, acknowledging topics that require courageous conversations, deciding what to do if there is a difficult moment, and creating pathways to connect to the instructor if there are things that are troubling you.[9] This also aligns with the classroom conduct policy noted above.
- Draw attention on syllabus day to the weeks/units that you believe might require a collective commitment to courageous conversations; reassure students that you will facilitate the courageous conversation as ethically as possible, with doing the due diligence to not re-traumatize marginalized students. Give students some space to discuss their needs and experiences and allow time to accommodate change in your syllabus.

- As an instructor, model the different norms and behaviors that you have established in the classroom. Acknowledge mistakes, if any, that you may make/made.[10] Think carefully about how you would word this and how you may be perceived. The experience may differ by gender, race/ethnicity, that is students may judge instructors very differently. We know from scholarship that the authority and knowledge of women of color faculty is often challenged in the classroom and so they are more likely to be vulnerable to complaints, questions, and poor evaluations from students.
- Depending on your comfort level and without having to divulge information that you do not want to (especially White women, women of color), consider connecting with students to know what they need so they can learn somethings about you and each other.[11]
- You can convey being anti-racist and inclusive. For example, consider framing "office hours" as "student hours". Again, these decisions may vary depending on how students perceive the instructors and their knowledge/expertise. Experiences may vary based on gender, race, ethnicity, or country of origin.[12] For example, many students expect women to conform to gendered norms of being 'nurturing' or women of color as being 'serious or angry.' Women of color may have to maintain a delicate balance between being supportive of students and ensuring they are respected for their knowledge and expertise.

Courageous Conversations within the classroom and during office hours
Pedagogical and teaching skills can be learnt and so we suggest practices that the instructor can think about in advance regarding classroom dynamics and ensuring learning.[13]
- If possible, emphasize the stakes of why we need to be deliberately discussing, assessing, and navigating differences, especially differences based in differential power. Note here that even the instructor's power may be diminished when gender and/or race are considered.
- Office hours are typically not intended to repeat a lecture. Graduate students, more than undergraduates, are expected to make notes in classes and be prepared to discuss the notes if they utilize office hours.
- Be deliberate in specifying the goals of the class, the stakes of what you're working on together, and why addressing these courageous topics is important.
- As noted above, think about and plan courageous conversations within the course in advance and consider using the following rubric.[14] Identify a clear purpose/stakes for why the conversation is necessary, give students advance 'warning', establish ground rules, provide a common basis for understanding, create a framework for the discussion, including everyone, being an active facilitator, summarize a discussion, and provide information on university resources.
- It might be useful to email students a week before the class that will entail a courageous conversation, letting them know what difficulties to expect as they prepare for class, during class, and assure them that you're committed to working through the challenges/difficulties together. Include a statement that tells students that the course will cover materials that they might disagree with for many reasons, but that they should approach the subject matter from a critical perspective. Their opinions or religious views matter, but they do not replace the complex process of critical analysis.
- If it feels safe, consider acknowledging the tension that might arise during "difficult" conversations. Be sensitive to and flexible when a discussion has become tense and try to be familiar with different ways of addressing the tension or the difficult moment.[15] During tense discussions in the class, consider asking students to take a break, follow up with students outside of the class, and design ways to engage with each other in future classes.
- Don't hesitate to slow the conversation down, asking for time to respond, and even encouraging students to not be reactive and to take time to consider alternative

modalities/frameworks/tones for returning to the conversation, perhaps during the following class.

- Use office/student hour conversations to draw attention to how a student's indifference or lack of cognizance towards their own and their peers' subject positions may be leading to behavior that violates the environment of the class.
- We suggest following the principle of "don't delay, but don't escalate." It is tough to gauge when there's a pressing need for a courageous conversation, and when something potentially challenging might resolve itself on its own. Again, give yourself and the student(s) time to regain equilibrium from a heated exchange before you decide on an office-hour conversation. Weigh the pros and cons of taking time versus addressing it immediately. Consider seeking a trusted colleague/confidant's perspective on a situation, to assess the level of reaction that might be required in a situation.
- Consider trigger warnings as an exercise in "pedagogical transparency," and not as an end in themselves.[16] Use them not as a way to avoid courageous conversations, but as an entry point into why a courageous conversation around a subject may be required. Begin class with a check-in and a discussion about the trigger-warning and whether it helped or added to the challenges the materials presented.
- Use university resources to report extreme behavior. See reporting options here. This website lists who to contact for concerns related to specific areas. They include reporting through your supervisory chain, and others such as Office of the Dean of Students (ODOS), Environmental Health and Public Safety (EHPS), Human Resources (HR), Information Technology (IT) among others listed on the website.
- It would be useful for White women and women of color faculty to be cognizant of managing their expectations of students. Expectations of excellence are often viewed, especially by graduate students, as being contrary to gender and racial stereotypes and norms. Women are expected to be nurturing and nice and accommodating; not serious, capable, excelling in research, or being highly productive.[17]

Course assessment and related conversations

Assessment and grades are central to what most students think about regarding a course. We are all familiar with questions such as, "Will this be in the test/exam?" or "I am an A student and so how can I get a poor grade only in your course?" In this section, we outline some best practices to consider for assessment and feedback to students.

- Consider being clear about assessment because it will prevent confusion of how assignments or exams were scored. So, include fair and clear assessment criteria for all assignments: rubrics, checklists, rationales for grading.
- Consider choosing supportive rather than punitive language when commenting on student work. But make clear what is not correct or weak so that a score or grade is not misleading.
- Make time if students approach you to discuss your comments/feedback. Anticipate this and make sure students know how to get in touch and start the conversation.
- In preparing for conversations with students in the classroom and during student hours, be reflexive and anticipate how different courageous conversations intersect with your positionality.

In conclusion

The best practices we have suggested is by no means exhaustive. We remind instructors to recognize the different ways they may be perceived because of gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation and other differences, as well as their intersections.

ENDNOTES

[1] Recommended citation: Subramaniam, Mangala, Megha Anwer, Jennifer Freeman Marshall, Shalini Low-Nam, and Laura Zanotti. 2021. How to Engage in Discussions of Differences Such as Race. Best Practices Tool #4B. Susan Bulkeley Butler Center for Leadership Excellence, Purdue University.

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[4] See Spring 2021 program of Susan Bulkeley Butler Center for Leadership Excellence.

[5] https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/06/04/whos-doing-heavy-lifting-terms-diversity-and-inclusion-work and https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/11/what-is-faculty-diversity-worth-to-a-university/508334/

[6] See https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/difficult-dialogues/

[7] A note on credit on where credit is due. This summary document curates resources from a diverse range of already published sources on inclusive syllabi projects. Footnotes and symbols indicate different source materials either by section or specific bullet points. A full list is provided at the end of the document. Also see Pete's 100 Ways: Indigenizing and Decolonizing Academic programs: Pete, S. (2016). 100 Ways: Indigenizing & Decolonizing Academic Programs. aboriginal policy studies, 6(1). https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/aps/index.php/aps/article/viewFile/27455/pdf

* See Inclusion by Design: http://cte.virginia.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Inclusion-by-Design-Survey-Your-Syllabus-Brantmeier-Broscheid-Moore-.pdf. Source - Waggoner, Jess, Hailee Yoshizaki-Gibbons, Ashley Mog, Krystal Clearly, and Margaret Price, Facilitators. Workshop: Disability Access as Feminist Praxis at NWSA and Beyond. National Women's Studies Conference. Baltimore, Maryland. November 18, 2017. https://www.academia.edu/35438137/Handout_Disability_Access_as_Feminist_Praxis_at_NWSA_and_Beyond

[8] See https://www.asccc.org/content/decolonizing-your-syllabus-anti-racist-guide-your-college

[9] See https://teachingcenter.wustl.edu/resources/inclusive-teaching-learning/establishing-ground-rules/

[10] See https://bokcenter.harvard.edu/inclusive-moves#navigating-difficult-moments

[11] See https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/difficult-dialogues/

[12] Allsopp, Marie. 2020. "Contemplating Course Comments, COVID-19 Crisis Communication Challenges, and Considerations – Change vs Color? *Susan Bulkeley Butler Center for Leadership Excellence and ADVANCE Working Paper Series* 3(2) Special Issue: 29-46.

[13] Additional resources to consider: (a) 100 Ways: Indigenizing and Decolonizing Academic Programs https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/aps/index.php/aps/article/viewFile/27455/pdf & (b) Difficult Conversations: https://mediaspace.itap.purdue.edu/media/1_keuzfx8r

[14] See https://teachingcenter.wustl.edu/resources/inclusive-teaching-learning/facilitating-challenging-conversations-in-the-classroom/

[15] See https://teachingcenter.wustl.edu/resources/inclusive-teaching-learning/facilitating-challenging-conversations-in-the-classroom/

[16] Fenner, S. (2018). Not so scary: Using and defusing content warnings in the classroom. *Journal of Political Science Education* 14(1), 86–96.

[17] Subramaniam, Mangala. 2019. "Underpinnings of Gender and Colorism in the Culture of Niceness in Universities." *Butler Center and Purdue-ADVANCE Working Paper Series - Navigating Careers in the Academy: Gender, Race, and Class*. 1(2): 5-16.