

Speech in the Classroom: Student Responsibilities in Classroom Discussion

TEACHING GUIDE

The Center for Ethics & Education created this curriculum plan to give faculty and students the tools to bridge philosophy and education. This teaching guide is intended for use in undergraduate and graduate education classes. The curriculum includes a teaching guide for one week of curriculum. We assume two 75-minute class meetings in one week.

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About the Center for Ethics & Education

SUGGESTED LESSON PLAN

Day 1

- I. Speech in the Immigration Classroom Case Study
- II. Overview of Recommended Readings
- III. Student Survey Report

Day 2

- I. Student Engagement Across Disagreement Case Study
- II. Guided Discussion Questions
- III. Discussion Activity

OUTLINE

Topic: Speech in the Classroom

This study guide introduces students to a variety of ethical questions concerning speech on campus and, specifically, in the classroom. Four readings provide the background ideas. The two case studies and the guiding questions are designed to take the students more deeply into the issues.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will become familiar with the main contours of the contemporary arguments about speech on campus.
- Students will be able to form a reasoned opinion about how classroom speech should, or should not, be regulated.
- Students will be better equipped to engage thoughtfully with reasonable views, opinions and arguments with which they disagree.

Readings & Audio:

Haidt, J., & Lukianoff, G. (2015). The Coddling of the American Mind. *The Atlantic*.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/09/the-coddling-of-tthe-american-mind/399356/>

Marchese, D. (2022). Why Critics of Angry Woke College Kids Are Missing the Point. *New York Times*.

https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/05/02/magazine/wendy-brown-interview.html?fbclid=IwAR0yzmjtHukR0vf-UTrwW2wj5_Ma0aI5EImTT8JkDqFMpJ7pPziS5SPX7AQ

The University of Chicago. (2014). *Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression*. University of Chicago.

<https://provost.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/documents/reports/FOECommitteeReport.pdf>

CASE STUDY I

SPEECH IN THE IMMIGRATION CLASSROOM

Learning Objectives: To embolden students to think about the responsibilities they hold to make space for, engage with, and maybe even encourage their classmates to express political and moral views that they may disagree with.

Recommended Instruction:

Print this case study and assign the roles below to students. Upon reading each act of the case study, pause and take a moment to discuss each of the concluding discussion questions (i.e., Act 1, Discussion Question 1, Act 2, Discussion Question 2...). After you have read through the entire case study aloud as a group, organize students into smaller groups to discuss the Further Discussion questions. Then, bring the whole class together once more and conduct a whole-class discussion using the prompts provided at the end of the case.

Cast:

Professor Harris
Jamal
Sirat
Ava
Sam
Kayla
Professor Carter
Professor Jackson

ACT ONE

“Did you do the reading last night?” Sirat asked Jamal, as they walked into class. They were taking a political philosophy course at a predominantly liberal public college, and the most recent reading was about the ethics of open borders in America. “Of course, I did,” Jamal responded, “it’s probably the most controversial reading we’ve had so far, so it was an interesting read.” Given the state of the political climate in 2020, immigration was a hot issue. While many political philosophy professors shied away from covering the topic, Professor Harris thought it was important to talk about. As the bell rang, the last few students took their seats, and Professor Harris began class.

Professor Harris: Alright everyone, this week we read a paper on the ethics of open borders in America. Who can sum up the author’s proposal in this piece?

Jamal raises his hand, and Professor Harris calls on him.

Jamal: What he argues is that when we think about national borders, we should ask what an unbiased person would say. Like, if you didn’t know which country you were from, what rules about border control would you want? He thinks the answer is that we would want a lot more freedom of movement than we have. So, I think he was saying that every country should relax its borders because governments don’t have the right to pick who gets to live there.

Professor Harris: Right, Jamal! The author is calling for almost completely open borders because that’s what we’d all agree to if we didn’t know what country we were living in. He argues that when we think about national borders, we should ask what an impartial observer would say. He thinks we’d agree that governments don’t have the right to determine who should live in the territories they govern. So, every country should relax its borders and allow whoever wants to live there to come and do so, placing only minimal conditions on residency.

For the rest of class, I’d like us to have an open discussion on this piece. To start us off, let’s think about a particular case. The argument implies that the borders between the US, Canada, and Mexico should be pretty much completely porous. Can we accept that consequence of the conclusion?

Silence

Sirat: I really liked the way the author made the argument. Suppose that you didn’t know whether or not you’d end up in the US, Canada, or Mexico? What rules would you want about borders? I think I’d want to be able to live in whatever country suits me best, so I’d want the borders to be open.

Ava: Yeah, I totally agree with Sirat. But I don’t see why borders should be there at all. My conclusion wouldn’t be that borders should be almost completely open. Just fully open!

Sam: I completely disagree. Think about all of the criminals that would enter our country if we had open borders. Especially with Mexico right next to us.

Sirat: Actually Sam, statistically immigrants commit crimes at much lower rates than native born US citizens. In fact, roughly 1.6 % of young immigrant males are incarcerated, compared to over 3% of the native-born[1].

Kayla: That only accounts for immigrants we chose to let in under our current, more strict policy. So I found myself mostly disagreeing with the author as well. I think there are a lot of potential problems associated with opening our borders with Mexico, like Sam pointed out. One issue with increasing immigration from Mexico is that Mexicans, statistically, commit much higher rates of crimes, such as sexual assaults and gang activities[2]. In fact, my hometown in Arizona just released a study showing that undocumented immigrants are 142% more likely to be convicted of a crime, are 43% more likely to commit serious crimes and be classified as dangerous and are much more likely to be gang members than U.S. citizens[3].

Silence

Professor Harris: Does anyone want to respond to that?

Jamal: I've got two ideas about that. One is just 'so what?' We don't deport Americans who commit crimes, and they have no more right to be here than Mexicans. The other is that I just doubt that the statistic is actually true.

Ava: Kayla, that's a racist thing to say, and you shouldn't have said it. It's harmful to Latinx students to hear that kind of attitude.

Sam: No, I see where Kayla is coming from. We can't just let criminals and rapists pour into our country like this. We should just halt immigration from Mexico now. It's time we build the wall.

Ava: I'm not putting up with this.

***She stands up, picks up her bag, and walks out of the room. ***

Discussion Question 1: What should Professor Harris do now?

¹ <https://asistahelp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/AIC-Crime-One-Pager.pdf>

² <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/crime-rate-by-country>

³ https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3099992

ACT TWO

After class, Professor Harris visited the teacher's lounge to reflect on what had happened in discussion. When he walked in, two other philosophy professors were sitting at a table, eating lunch.

Professor Carter: How did your discussion go?

Professor Harris: Well, I thought the discussion itself went ok, but there was one incident that wasn't great.

Professor Harris shares what had happened and then asks his colleagues what they thought about the situation.

Professor Jackson: To be completely candid, I really don't think you went about this topic the right way. When you choose to teach such a controversial paper like this, and then you use a contentious discussion prompt, you're bound to have students make offensive and borderline racist statements. Harris, the way you taught this topic was fanning the flames of controversy and, quite frankly, was just asking for problematic responses.

Professor Carter: I hear what you're saying Jackson, but I think Harris introduced the discussion perfectly. It's important for students to engage with each other on even the most controversial issues. Fear of a student saying something problematic shouldn't keep you from having an open discussion. This is a college-level political philosophy course, after all.

Professor Jackson: I'm not so sure. What happens next time when there actually is a Latinx student in the classroom? And that student's identity is attacked by these comments? I don't think the university would be very happy with how that 'open discussion' went.

Professor Carter: I don't care what the administration says. I take your point about the student's identity, but do you really think that Latinx students don't know that there are people who think these things? Isn't it better for them to hear them in a classroom, where they can be challenged, rather than just as slogans on TV? In the classroom, I think we should be a lot more worried about students' ideas that should be heard not getting heard, than about ideas that shouldn't be heard getting heard. Having an open discussion and making students feel comfortable with sharing their thoughts is vital to developing open mindedness and critical thinking.

Professor Harris: Both of you make valid points. I'll have to do a lot of thinking about Thursday's class. In the meantime, I have to decide what to do about Ava's walking out. What should I do about that?

Discussion Question 2: With whose point of view do you have more sympathy, Carter or Jackson? Why?

ACT THREE

After class had ended, a small group of students walked to the café together and discussed what had been said in class.

Ava: Wow, can you guys believe what Kayla and Sam said in class?

Sirat: Yeah, what Sam said was definitely not okay, and I understand why you were mad at him. But to be honest Ava, I'm not sure it was alright for you to shut down Kayla's point of view like that.

Ava: Wait, really? You don't think what she said was problematic? She was basically insinuating that all Mexicans are criminals and rapists. That's racist.

Sirat: I don't think she was doing that. Her point was valid and worded respectfully. She gave what she thought was a fact, and if she's wrong about that she should be corrected. But just because Kayla doesn't support open borders, that doesn't mean she's racist.

Jamal: I don't know, I think I agree with Ava. If you think about it, all Kayla said was just the 'statistical' wording of Sam's racist response. Sirat, if you agree that Sam's point was problematic, then I think you should see Kayla's response as unacceptable as well.

Ava: Exactly!

Sirat: No, I don't think their responses were the same at all. If a neighboring country has higher rates of crime, violence, and drug activity amongst its citizens, I don't think it's racist to be concerned about having open borders with that country. I don't think you should have walked out, Ava. We don't want to shut down all the classmates we disagree with, and only hear the things that we already agree with.

Jamal: I think she was right to walk out. We shouldn't have to put up with that sort of talk. But I guess I see where you're coming from. Maybe as students we do have a responsibility to keep the discussions open. But not that open. Anyway, class this Thursday will be interesting.

Discussion Question 3: *In light of the whole case, what responsibility do you think students have to make space for, engage with--and maybe even encourage their classmates to express--political and moral views that they disagree with?*

CASE STUDY I

Discussion Questions

FURTHER DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Divide students into small groups. Give each of these questions to one third of the groups and let them discuss the question they've been assigned for 10 minutes. Then, have each group give a short report back to the whole class, giving each group around 90 seconds.

1. Do you think it was inappropriate/offensive for Kayla to share that statistic?
 - a. Do you think Jamal is right that Kayla and Sam's responses were nearly the same?
2. Imagine you are a student in the class. How should you respond to Kayla, Sam, or Ava?
 - a. Was it right/acceptable for Ava to walk out of class?
3. Should Professor Harris not have chosen to have a unit on such a highly controversial topic?
 - a. Whose argument do you think had more merit - Professor Carter's or Professor Jackson's?

QUESTIONS CENTRAL TO THE CASE

Conduct a whole-class discussion focused on the following two questions:

1. What norms around thinking out loud should students observe and hold their classmates to? When is it morally okay for students to try to shut down a point of view that is being expressed?
2. When teachers are teaching controversial issues in the college classroom, how open should they be to diverse perspectives among the students and how should they ensure and enforce that? Are there perspectives that they should not be open to? If so, how should they determine what those perspectives are?

RECOMMENDED READING

Students should read the following three core readings to gain background knowledge on the topic and to guide the rest of their learning. The fourth piece, titled “Centering the Student Obligation to Create an Open Classroom Environment” by Harry Brighouse, is optional.

The Chicago Principles

The Chicago Principles of Free Expression outlines the University of Chicago’s commitment to free, robust, and uninhibited debate and conversation on campus amongst all members of the university community. This document proposes principles for colleges and universities to use in order to foster healthy, intellectual, and productive discussion, so that students and faculty can learn from one another regardless of differences in beliefs.

“The Coddling of the American Mind” by Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt

“The Coddling of the American Mind” surveys the current movement across American colleges and universities to create safe spaces in which students can avoid any potentially harmful language or topics. Lukianoff and Haidt provide an overview of cultural trends that contribute to this new behavior. As a result of these cultural trends, emotional reasoning and trigger warnings entered academic discussions, potentially interrupting learning. To combat this new practice, the authors suggest concrete ways for campus communities to engage in challenging conversations. For example, they propose relaxation of regulations on harassment that, owing to the possible legal consequences, many institutions fear. Additionally, they argue, classes need to equip students with the tools to engage in productive conversations where they can freely explore ideas, thereby preparing them for the real world.

“Why Critics of Angry Woke College Kids are Missing the Point” by David Marchese

Influential political theorist Wendy Brown studies identity, freedom, and tolerance. In this interview, she expresses concerns about discussion and debate on college campuses. While agreeing that the classroom should be a space in which students are challenged and engage in disagreement with one another, Brown does not believe focusing on free speech helps resolve the real problems around classroom interaction. Institutions and instructors face barriers to facilitating challenging conversations, which include adjunctification, corporatization, and evaluation systems. Brown proposes that curriculums should encompass all aspects of a topic, rather than allowing campus culture to influence curriculum, so that students can form their own, educated, opinions.

Centering the Student Obligation to Create an Open Classroom Environment

Harry Brighouse

According to a recent intelligence.com report,

52 percent of all college students say they always or often withhold views on political and social issues in the classroom due to potential consequences. Conservative students are more likely to suppress their opinions, with 55 percent admitting that they continuously or frequently keep quiet about policy or societal matters. Fifty-two percent of moderate students and 49 percent of liberal students also avoid sharing points of view out of fear of consequences. The most common concerns among respondents are losing the respect of professors and classmates, social ostracization, and jeopardizing their grades.

This is not a free speech problem. Students are not reporting that anyone is requiring them to keep their opinions to themselves, or that they fear formal sanctions from the university or the government. Fear of an effect on grades is about power differentials and coercion, but that is only one motivation for keeping quiet, and maybe not the main one. Let's call it, instead, a classroom speech problem. Classroom discussions and interactions are lopsided, and suboptimal, not because the student body doesn't contain conservative, or unorthodox liberal, students, but because those students, when present, disproportionately withhold their authentic thinking. And, although the intelligence.com report frames the problem in terms of conservative students, the phenomenon doesn't just affect them. Plenty of students of color students, and plenty of working-class students, withhold their viewpoints on race, or class, for the same kinds of reason, as do students with unorthodox views in certain classes (e.g., the pacifist student who doesn't speak up in a class about WWII).

Some people think this isn't even happening. The Intelligence report, and my own conversations with numerous students, conservative, liberal, and simply unorthodox, who have taken my classes, suggest otherwise. Others acknowledge the phenomenon but think that little is lost at least when it comes to conservative views: they believe that conservative perspectives offer little or nothing to intellectually valuable classroom discussion. Better, they think, to keep those perspectives out of the room.

I think that's a mistake. Obviously, our experiences color our perception of the problem. But my experience in the classroom, on a campus that is liberal (though less liberal than it thinks it is) has not at all been that conservative students, once they learn that my classroom is open to a wide range of perspectives, abuse that by injecting unduly partisan or provocative viewpoints. They tend to reason along with the other students, entertaining views that they don't necessarily accept, but providing ideas and reasons that their peers might otherwise skate over.

What are students worried about? First, they fear losing the respect of their instructors. So, first of all, this is a challenge for instructors: how do we make our classrooms open enough that the full range of legitimate perspectives on whatever topic we are focused on -- abortion, physician-assisted suicide, racial integration, the first Gulf War, charter schools, the use of testing in college admissions, welfare reform -- are aired and carefully scrutinized? It takes planning and thought, as well as skill and emotional intelligence. Most campuses have some sort of folklore about who does this well, but no campus I know of has reliable mechanisms for identifying those instructors and getting others to learn from them how to do it.

Second, though, the students who withhold their perspectives fear losing the respect of, or being ostracised by, their classmates. This, too, is a challenge for instructors. How do we ensure that all our students 'get' how to respect one another and genuinely engage with one another across their political and moral disagreements? But it is also a challenge for the students themselves.

Imagine being a liberal student on a liberal campus, in a small (20 student) classroom with a preponderance of students who agree with you. The instructor clearly wants to create an open classroom environment, and wants the students to engage with one another, and has some skills in discussion facilitation. Imagine that 3 of your fellow students are conservative, and you know that they are extremely reluctant to express their authentic opinions about the issues under discussion. You could, of course, just trust the professor to ensure that all perspectives are heard and engaged. But, despite her skills, the instructor needs the cooperation of the liberal majority. You could, equally, through negative body language or dismissive comments, try to close them down. Alternatively, you could actively encourage those students to share their views, perhaps just through positive body language, or through nudging, or otherwise encouraging them. In an overwhelmingly conservative classroom with a few liberal students, the conservatives in the room have the same options available to them.

Academic treatments of speech, and public discourse about, speech in the classroom tend to focus on the obligations (and, to a lesser extent the skills) of instructors. But one of the central questions we want students to think about is what obligations they themselves have if they are in this situation. What should they do?
and they'll be less marginalized."

Student Survey Report

As prefaced by the recommended readings, discussion in the college classroom is undermined by more than just underdeveloped communication skills. As Lukianoff, Haidt, and Brown suggest, discussion in the classroom is muffled by the onset of cultural trends seeped in forms of emotional reasoning, such as political partisanship, trigger warnings, and “wokeness.” A series of informal surveys conducted at the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus confirms this.

For instance, in a class composed almost exclusively of liberal-to-left wing identifying students, about 70% of survey respondents agreed that students who held views that differed from theirs would feel uncomfortable voicing them while on campus. To corroborate these results, about 75% of the class disagreed with the statement, “On my campus, students who have views similar to mine feel uncomfortable voicing them.” Yet, as the survey results suggest, many students think it is better to keep quiet than to speak out with an opinion that other people may not agree with.

In another surveyed class, over half of the students expressed feeling anxious about expressing views on political and moral questions out of fear that either their instructor or fellow peers would judge them negatively. Their testimonies echoed these findings. One student hinted towards political partisanship on campus as a major contributor to their anxiety:

“As someone who leans more conservative and attends a rather liberal institution, it can be hard to speak out without the thought of being judged by those around me. While I know that people are entitled to their own opinions, being in the minority for political views can be hard because it’s an innate notion for humans to judge others...Humans seeks those similar to them and when people bring up ideas that conflict with theirs, they are more likely to take more time to gain trust. For this reason, it’s never fun in a conversation to go against the grain when you know that you will most likely convey conflicting views of the majority around you.”

On the other hand, those who believed that their views on political and moral subject matters fit in with the rest of campus culture expressed being able to convey their opinions with greater ease. Nevertheless, they find it difficult to share when they knowingly share a different view from a greater group in which they are situated:

“Usually, my professors seem to be pretty liberal. While my views may not match theirs exactly, I do feel comfortable expressing myself in front of them as someone who is more liberal. Even if my professors are not liberal, I usually do not fear their judgment or grading too much. I tend to speak with honesty, but I am always conscientious of how I speak and present myself. From a social aspect, knowing my views differ from my peers in larger groups makes it a bit harder to share. I see them outside of a classroom setting, and debates carry over into non-facilitated areas.”

Lastly, another commonality amongst surveyed students was a fear of reprisal when disagreeing with professor or instructor viewpoints. In fact, in one surveyed classroom, less than 20% of students felt as though their professor often created “a classroom climate in which people with unpopular views would feel comfortable sharing their opinions.” Several student testimonies conveyed this, with many directly speaking to stifling their true opinions so as to not risk harming their grade:

“It’s only natural that my instructors will hold their own political views, but there have been times when I have been concerned that my political/social views could result in my professors/TAs disliking or not respecting me moving forward, thus potentially harming my grade. Thinking about it now it might be morally messed up to ‘fake’ an ideology in order to potentially gain a better grade... but that’s the life isn’t it.”

In sum, these survey results and accompanying student testimonies add validation to Lukianoff, Haidt, and Brown’s observations. Students have, to a greater extent, felt the need to censor their viewpoints and opinions to avoid judgment from both peers and their instructors. For this reason, it has become increasingly important to reassess the ways in which discussion is being cultivated in the classroom setting, especially when political and moral issues are at the center of the conversation.

CASE STUDY II

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT ACROSS DISAGREEMENT

Learning Objectives: To encourage students to evaluate the responsibilities of majority and minority opinions when discussing controversial moral and political questions.

Recommended Instruction:

Print this case study and assign the roles below to students. After you have read through the entire case study aloud as a group, organize students into smaller groups to discuss the guiding questions. Then, bring the class back together and continue discussion without report backs from the individual small groups.

Possible Writing Assignment (after reading the case):

Imagine you are Professor Williams. How should you respond? Write a 600-word response to Professor Cobb's email.

Cast:

Professor Cobb

Lucia

Bradley

Ralph

Demarcus

Harriet

Sierra

Guiding Questions

Read all three questions and decide which one you'd like to answer first. Spend half of your time on that question and the other half on the remaining two questions.

1. If there is a minority opinion in a discussion, does the majority have any specific obligations? Does the minority have any specific obligations? For instance, did Harriet and/or Lucia have specific obligations in the discussion? Did Sierra have specific obligations?
2. How could Harriet and/or Lucia have done a better job of bringing different views into the discussion?
3. What would you have done if you were a student in that classroom?
 - a. Assuming Professor Cobb did his job in the classroom, what are the obligations, if any, of the students to each other and to making the conversation productive?

ACT ONE: The Classroom

Professor Cobb teaches at a predominantly liberal public college in the educational policy studies department. During the last ten minutes of his course “School in Society,” Professor Cobb introduces the topic for the following week and opens up the discussion to gauge students’ initial thoughts on the issue. Given the current political climate following recent national events involving altercations between police officers and racial minorities, Professor Cobb was somewhat apprehensive to hear what his students had to say.

Professor Cobb: Ok, so next week we’re going to discuss police in high schools. You know that many high schools have dedicated police officers. To prime you, I thought we could end today by thinking about police on our own campus. So, let’s talk about the current student government proposal to abolish the campus police department. Who wants to share their initial thoughts?

Lucia begins speaking before anyone else has a chance to raise their hand.

Lucia: We should defund the police on our campus and in society. The police on this campus cause more harm than good, and I just don’t think we need them at all. They don’t make anyone feel safe and make many of us feel even less safe.

Ralph: I totally agree. Our tuition money could be used for much better programs. Like, the money could be used for a buddy program when students don’t want to walk home alone. Or for funding a community program or something to help reduce crime.

Demarcus: I also agree with what’s been said. But I just want to add that we know police have been racist. I think we can all agree that marginalized students don’t need another thing to worry about on campus.

Lucia: Going off of what Demarcus said, the police are also unnecessarily militarized when they don’t need to be. And we all know this country has a problem with guns.

Professor Cobb: Would anyone like to respond to any of the points that have been brought up?

Silence

Lucia: Yeah, it’s really important to hear other views too.

Harriet: Wait... Sierra, aren’t your parents police officers?

Silence

Sierra: Uh, yeah...they are.

Silence

Sierra: I mean, I respect what my parents do. Like, it's actually a pretty difficult job. Police officers risk their lives to protect their communities. And I don't think they get much appreciation.

Lucia: But there are definitely other ways of keeping our community safe that don't target minorities and result in unnecessary violence. So, yeah, I don't think we need police on campus.

Bradley: Yeah, remember that controversy last fall where campus police kept questioning that black student? Apparently, they wouldn't let him into the football game because they thought he was using stolen tickets.

Sierra: Yeah, I heard about that, but not all cops are like that. Most of them do their job fairly and well, only a few are racist.

Demarcus: I don't know what to say. Do you guys get stopped regularly on campus by police? Because that happens to me almost every other week as a black student on campus.

Sierra: That doesn't happen to me, and it shouldn't happen to you. But every woman in this room is cautious about walking around campus at night, or even when it's empty. If we didn't have the campus police that would get even worse.

Demarcus: Well, defunding the police wouldn't necessarily make that worse...

Sierra: Yeah, but nobody ever explains what they mean by defunding the police like, that phrase gets tossed around a lot without much definition.

Lucia: I mean it's been in the news nonstop... It's a very big issue. It's kinda problematic to think that things are fine the way they are.

Sierra: Sorry, that's not what I meant. I was just asking what that would actually look like. anyone like to respond to any of the points that have been brought up?

Lucia: Oh well I don't know what the exact plan would look like, but I just know police wouldn't be a part of it.

Professor Cobb: Okay class... I'm sorry, we're out of time for today. Thanks everybody for sharing. Think about this over the weekend, do the assigned reading, and we'll talk about police in high schools next week.

ACT TWO: The Aftermath

After the class is dismissed, Sierra finds Harriet in the hallway.

Sierra: Uh, hey Harriet... I know you didn't mean anything by it but I kinda felt like you put me on the spot in front of the whole class today.

Harriet: Oh, I definitely wasn't trying to do that. I just wanted to make sure other perspectives were being brought up. It seemed like the conversation was getting kinda biased.

Sierra: Yeah, I get that, but should I have to share if I'm not comfortable? I mean, I'm happy to share my beliefs with my friends, but it's not always easy for me to do that on a campus like this. Students always preach about wanting open discussions, but they're quick to shut down anything that doesn't fit into their liberal agenda.

Harriet: I'm sorry, I was just trying to make it easier for you. Like, I get frustrated that people aren't saying what they're thinking in classrooms. It's important that everyone can hear other opinions when talking about stuff like this.

Sierra: But then, why didn't you bring up a different viewpoint, if you thought it needed to be expressed?

Harriet: Well, why should I have to express a viewpoint I don't believe in? Wouldn't it be better for someone who really holds a view to express it?

Sierra: Honestly, for someone like me it would be much easier to share my own views in class if it were more of an open discussion. Sometimes it's like I'm being lectured by my own peers and if the majority of the class already agrees with one another, I feel like I'd be shut down and not welcome in the conversation. Besides, you could've just asked me what I thought, instead of what my parents do for a living.

Harriet: Why does it matter what other students contribute to the conversation though? Just like you have a right to express your opinion, they have a right to express theirs.

Sierra: True, but this campus doesn't always welcome more conservative viewpoints. Speakers that come to campus are usually on one side of the spectrum, and professors and TAs often let their beliefs seep into their teaching. It feels as though there isn't much room for disagreement.

Harriet: Well, I've gotta go to class now. I'm sorry if I put you on the spot, I just know that this is an important issue. I think things will go better next week anyway since we're learning more about it. I'll see you later though, bye!

ACT THREE: Professor Cobb's Email to Colleague Professor Williams

Hi,

Are we still on to meet this Thursday to discuss Jane's paper? If so, I'll send the Zoom link to you.

I want to get your opinion on what happened in one of my sections today. In my School in Society class, I prompted them to chat about the place of police on campus, in preparation for next week's readings on having officers in schools. As expected, several students were determinedly in favor of abolishing the campus police. But one of them called out another student whose parents are cops, and really put her on the spot. She seemed so awkward, defending their profession, and clearly didn't want to be talking. And then she got completely shut down when she asked, I thought pretty innocently, just what the slogan 'defund the police' amounts to.

We were short on time, and I just moved on. You know my views about the police. But should I have backed her up and played devil's advocate? Or should I just not have had that discussion right now - too controversial?

Anyways, let me know about Thursday.

-LC

DISCUSSION

Guided Questions

Here are some questions that you could use for an online discussion on your LMS after the students have read the articles but before they discuss anything in class. These questions would also work well for in-person discussion.

One approach: have students each write a discussion post and respond to at least one other student's post.

1. How, if at all, do the Chicago Principles help in thinking about what should happen in the first case study? Or the second? (This question is designed to prompt a close reading of the Principles.)
2. Should professors include trigger warnings to flag potentially emotionally charged topics within their curriculum?
 - a. What, if anything, would the Chicago Principles imply about using trigger warnings?
 - b. What are the potential downsides of using trigger warnings?
 - c. If you think trigger warnings are ever appropriate, what guidance would you give instructors about when trigger warnings are, and when they aren't, appropriate?
3. Wendy Brown argues that students' views should not dictate curricular choices. In your opinion, to what extent should instructors take students' views into account when making curricular choices?
4. What are the preconditions for a successful discussion in which really strong disagreements get aired?

Here are some possible discussion questions you could use for an in-person discussion after the students have read the articles.

1. The phrase liberal arts education is used in many ways by many people; it's a phrase that doesn't have one agreed definition. Think about and discuss: What educational outcomes do you think a liberal arts education should promote?
2. Do discussions in which deep disagreements get aired have educational value? If so, what would you say that value is?
3. In a group, develop a short counterpoint to Wendy Brown's position.
4. In a group, develop a short counterpoint to the position taken by Lukianoff and Haidt.

DISCUSSION EXERCISE

Structured Academic Controversy

A structured academic controversy (SAC) is an exercise designed to induce students to explore all the arguments for and against a particular claim or idea. Students are divided into a 'for' and an 'against' group and told to develop reasons for the position they've been assigned, relay those reasons to one another, and discuss them together. (The version of a SAC offered here is streamlined compared with the standard SAC which was developed for secondary school students.)

Proposition: Our school should adopt the Chicago Principles to guide pedagogical and administrative thinking about speech on campus.

Break the class into groups of four. Divide each group of four into two groups of two (A and B).

A groups will be in favor of the proposition; **B** groups will be against.

Groups A & B separately work out the reasons for their position (5 mins)

Group A tells group B what their arguments are (3 mins)

Group B tells group A what their arguments are (3 mins)

Groups of four discuss the proposition in role (4 minutes)

Open out to whole class discussion: students do not have to stay in the role they were assigned at this point.

THE CENTER FOR ETHICS & EDUCATION

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