

Managing Hot Moments in the Classroom*

Prior to the Course

- Be aware of issues that raise strong feelings in you so that you can prepare or practice an appropriate response.
- Consider how students see you and how they might hear what you say as other than you intend.
- Learn about perspectives other than your own.
- Explore your own biases (e.g. take the Implicit Attitudes Test <http://www.tolerance.org/activity/test-yourself-hidden-bias>).

At the Beginning of and During the Course

- Ask students to develop ground rules for discussion. If students do not suggest it, ensure that the list includes items about students being respectful to each other and avoiding personal attacks.
- Encourage open discussion of difficult material.
- Be open to multiple perspectives.
- Ask students to argue responsibly.

In the Moment

Manage yourself

- Model the behavior you want to see in your students; maintain control of the classroom and try not to be visibly rattled.
- Breathe deeply – take time to calm yourself.
- Taking a moment where you are silent is also fine.
- Do not take remarks personally, even if you are attacked. You may be a target because you are the authority figure in the room.

Manage your perceptions

- Take a step back from the specific comments being made. Visualize yourself at a higher elevation in order to see what is happening from a broader perspective.
- Listen for what the student trying to express. A student may be trying to say something other than what their words reflect.

Help students manage their thinking

- Address the issue. Do not ignore it. A lack of response to bias or disrespect will likely be perceived as agreement or indifference. If you need time to think about the incident/comment, tell students that the issue is important and you will return to it in a future class session.
- Refer to the course ground rules.
- Turn the comment into a general issue for all students to discuss. For example, you could say “Many people think this way. Why do they hold such views? Why do those who disagree hold other views?”
- Ask students to listen carefully to the other point of view and restate the position.
- Ask students to write about the issue. Consider having students argue the position with which they most disagree.
- Ask students to reflect on what they might learn from the moment; consider asking them to briefly write about what they have learned.
- If a student breaks down or discloses a past injury or harm, give them the option of leaving the classroom. It is best to do this while talking individually with the student, rather than stating it in front of the class. Talk with them while other students are busy, or after class. If appropriate, let the student know where they might seek counseling; perhaps walk with them to the counseling center.
- Talk with students outside of class to help them learn from the experience—about themselves, about others, about possible perspectives, about the topic as a whole—and how to voice their thoughts so they may be heard.